

# The Fiction of Hilda Vaughan (1892-1985): Negotiating the Boundaries of Welsh Identity

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This thesis is submitted to Cardiff University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

December 2008

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## Summary

Hilda Vaughan was a successful writer from the 1920s to the 1950s whose novels, short stories and plays, largely depicting the Welsh countryside, found international renown. Married to the celebrated author and playwright, Charles Morgan, she moved in illustrious literary circles both in London and in Wales. The second half of the twentieth century saw her writing fall into critical neglect, in part due to Vaughan's elevated social class, which distanced her work from that of many of her Welsh contemporaries. Vaughan inhabits a complex ideological position: she was a Welsh writer, writing in English, who lived for the majority of her life in London. She wrote novels that depicted the lives of working-class agricultural communities, though she was herself descended from the class of small-landowners. Much of her work is set in her beloved Radnorshire / Breconshire birthplace and this area close to the Welsh / English border, with its dual cultural influences, informs much of her writing. This thesis examines the negotiation and renegotiation of identity in Vaughan's work, with particular emphasis on the construction of nation, the depiction of gender and the effect of social class in her narratives. Chapters one to four of the thesis explore Vaughan's texts as they engage with contemporary issues, such as the scientific ideas of Social Darwinism and anthropology at the beginning of the twentieth century, the expansion of mass Anglo-American culture during this period and its effect on Wales, the emerging roles for women at this time, and the First and Second World wars and their destabilising influence on Welsh and British identities. Chapters five to seven examine Vaughan's depiction of the landscape, folklore and language of Wales as her work reforges connections with an 'estranged' Wales, rebuilding and reinforcing a sense of Welsh identity in the novels.



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## Introduction

In the summer of 1926 Hilda Vaughan's second novel, *Here Are Lovers*, had been published, following on from her highly successful debut, *The Battle to the Weak* (1925), and a sense of excitement was building up around the young Welsh novelist. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the Welsh press, in which celebratory articles appeared with an enthusiastic frequency. An article featured in the *Cambria Daily Leader* on the 25<sup>th</sup> of July of that year is particularly memorable because of the whimsical portrait it paints of the author in her youth:

As a child Miss Vaughan had a wonderful time. She kept all sorts of pets including a large collection of lizards which she specially liked, and she never went to school... This left her free to roam the countryside, where she made friends with all sorts of country people...<sup>1</sup>

The description reads like a fictional tale and the figure it portrays of a young girl roaming the countryside conjures images not unlike the heroines found in Vaughan's own narratives, though the lizards lend an air of exoticism incongruous in the Welsh setting. What is most intriguing, however, is the relationship between Vaughan and her native country that is suggested here. Though immersed in the Welsh landscape, Vaughan cuts a solitary figure in her surroundings. Hers is an individual experience of Wales and Welshness, not representative of Welsh life as a shared experience. Though she makes friends along her journey, she does not join her peers at school. She is an observer who does not fully participate in the cultural institutions that would link her to her fellow country-people. The simultaneous proximity and dislocation suggested here provide

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<sup>1</sup> *Cambria Daily Leader*, July 25<sup>th</sup>, 1926.

tensions that would indeed characterise Vaughan's relationship with her native country and inform much of her work that was to follow.

The distance between Vaughan and her fellow country-people in the passage above can be partly accounted for by her social class. It was into the small-land-owning class that Vaughan was born in 1892 in Builth Wells, just on the Breconshire side of the border with Radnorshire. Her father, Hugh Vaughan Vaughan, was a country solicitor, Under Sheriff of Radnorshire and landlord apparently beloved of his tenants, whose outpourings of grief at his death in 1936 are vividly described by Hilda Vaughan in a letter to her husband.<sup>2</sup> The remnants of this feudal society underpin the narrative structure of many of Vaughan's novels, such as *Her Father's House* (1930) and *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* (1932). This places Vaughan's work alongside that of her contemporary, Eiluned Lewis, whose similar upbringing is reflected in her semi-autobiographical novel, *Dew on the Grass* (1934); a resemblance which Vaughan acknowledges explicitly in her own autobiographical essay, 'A Country Childhood' (1934). Vaughan's mother, a Campbell of Scottish and English extraction, was keen to ensure that her two daughters did not acquire the 'Welshy' accent of the neighbourhood and Vaughan was schooled by various governesses and reputedly forbidden from reading a modern novel until she reached adulthood.<sup>3</sup> Vaughan was devoted to her father but eager to escape the controlling influence of her mother. In her desire to leave the stifling constraints of home, her career could have taken a very different path, as the young

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<sup>2</sup> In a letter from Hilda Vaughan to Charles Morgan, dated Sunday night, April 4<sup>th</sup> 1937, Vaughan writes about her father's funeral, 'which is to be on Thursday, we think; but may be rushed on to Wednesday in order to allow all the loving tradespeople of Builth to attend on "early closing day"! They would rather bury my father than go to a football match, even! But their devotion will be touching, none the less.' Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan, son of Hilda Vaughan and Charles Morgan.

<sup>3</sup> See Hilda Vaughan, 'A Country Childhood', *Radnorshire Society Transactions* (1982), 9-18 (14).

Vaughan wrote to a friend in 1914 of her plans to move to London to embark on a career in fashion.<sup>4</sup>

The outbreak of the First World War, however, put paid to her intentions and Vaughan remained in Wales, where she became immersed in the war effort. For two years she served as a cook in a Red Cross hospital, where, due to her unfamiliarity with domestic tasks, she hid a cookery book beneath her apron.<sup>5</sup> She went on to become organising secretary for the Women's Land Army in Breconshire and Radnorshire. In this role she so impressed the novelist Berta Ruck at a recruitment meeting in Newtown, that Ruck made the young Vaughan a character in one of her novels.<sup>6</sup> Vaughan's early correspondence bears testament to the formative role that the war played in her young adulthood. She kept many letters from soldiers thanking her for the parcels she sent them.<sup>7</sup> Most importantly, it was her time in the Women's Land Army that also brought her into close contact with the lives of the Welsh working-class women who would feature so prominently in her future novels. Letters during this time also refer to the personal dramas of women's lives as Vaughan helped to secure work for mothers of illegitimate children and coped with the elopement of her Land Girls.<sup>8</sup> It is perhaps

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<sup>4</sup> In a letter dated June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1914 from Stanley Bligh to Vaughan, Bligh responds to Vaughan's desire to pursue a career as a fashion designer. He writes, 'I daresay the fashion plate business would be a better reason for getting away from home than any other, so you had better push at it.' Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>5</sup> According to Mr. Roger Morgan in an interview on September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> In a letter from Berta Ruck to Hilda Vaughan, dated May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1916, Ruck writes, '[f]or some time now I have had the idea that my next novel should treat the question of girls on the land. The Newtown meeting settled it ... I think that with the public which I already have this ought to be help to your recruiting; in return you could, by giving me data and copy, be such a help to me! You have been through the mill yourself, and you have seen and know, and you are a fellow-countrywoman.' Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>7</sup> Vaughan's correspondence includes many letters from soldiers thanking her for parcels and kindnesses. For example from Pte. J. Lepperton, dated August 16<sup>th</sup>, 1915; Alfred Jackson, dated February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1916; S. J. Jones, dated only 1915. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>8</sup> For example, a letter dated July 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1918 from the Chairman of the Cultivation committee reads, 'I heard on Friday that one of our Timber Girls had eloped with a Sergeant from the Penoyre, and that, as the

unsurprising, then, that it was during this period that Vaughan began to write in earnest and her juvenilia can be roughly dated to this time.<sup>9</sup>

What is most interesting about this early work is the fact that it was written in collaboration. Her literary partner was Gertrude Painter, an upper-middle-class woman also from Builth Wells who would later become Lady Carter.<sup>10</sup> A collection of sketches depicting a farmer named David Owen is attributed to 'H. V. and G. P.' The farmer seems to be an early prototype of Daniel Evans, the chief protagonist of *The Invader* (1928). In particular, the farmer's description and explanation of the 'shearing stick' in the story, 'Shearing', finds its way directly into the later novel.<sup>11</sup> Correspondence between the two women describes their shared literary process. In an undated letter, probably written in 1916, Painter writes,

[t]o-night I've gone on with the book a bit, I want to get quite a good bit ready for you when you come for a week end. I'm overjoyed at the idea of our writing together. We must always do so, but I'm bored that we didn't discover one another sooner before each was too busy to be with the other.<sup>12</sup>

The balance of power in this writing relationship is suggested by another of Painter's letters:

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Matron was away, Lady Glanusk was in a terrible stew... Things look more cheerful on the front just now, but we can't reckon on that. This time next year, if it goes on there will be only men of fifty-five and women to run everything at home here; and if we don't take a little more trouble to train the women, its not a very bright look-out.' In addition, an undated letter from Myrtle Wood explains that she has had an illegitimate child and Vaughan has helped her get a place with a family. She writes to 'thank you very much for the faith you had in me...' Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>9</sup> The inscription on the envelope containing the sketches reads: 'These are *sketches* of Welsh country life. *Ill-written* when I was in my *early twenties*, they might, if retold, make a v. humble little sister vol: to Turgenev's "*Sportsman's Sketches*". Hilda Vaughan.' They are signed 'H.V and G. P.'

<sup>10</sup> Painter would later become a novelist and playwright in her own right, though her success did not match that of Vaughan. She wrote the plays *The White Colt*, *The Kite's Feather*, *The Tramp*, *Daffodil Juice* and *The Sheepstealers* and her novel *Tillage of the Poor* was published in 1926. The dates of the plays are unclear and not all of them were produced or published, though at least one was and is referred to (though not named) in a letter from Vaughan to Morgan dated September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1926, quoted in chapter two of this thesis. In correspondence, Painter is referred to by her nickname, 'Button'.

<sup>11</sup> 'Shearing' is included in the unpublished and uncatalogued sketches in Vaughan's juvenilia.

<sup>12</sup> Letter from Gertrude Painter to Hilda Vaughan. It is undated but is included amongst other letters all dated 1916 and seems also to have been written at this time. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

I am getting bewildered with all your instructions, but don't stop sending them, they stimulate me, only I'm exceedingly depressed that I'll never come up to your standard. I'm just putting my best into it, and you must come along and slash and cut vigorously one day...<sup>13</sup>

In the first letter 'the book' referred to seems to be *The Invader* (1928). A 1922 letter from Vaughan's husband, Charles Morgan, confirms that this was the first of Vaughan's novels and that the draft version was written in collaboration:

I've read 'The Invasion' [sic] amid the sunshine ... Collaboration is an unsolved mystery to me. I can't distinguish your own part from Miss Painter's so I'll talk of the book as if it had a single author - and I'll call her 'you.' ... I think you're going to write work so much better that you will be glad some day that you didn't publish this as your first novel. Some day you'll re-write it. It will be your third or fourth novel. I am desperately anxious to see the second.<sup>14</sup>

This was advice that Vaughan heeded: *The Invader* (1928) was the third of Vaughan's novels to be published and was dedicated to Gertrude Carter.

In 1922 Vaughan moved to London where she enrolled on a writing course at Bedford College for Women. Her relocation to the English capital saw her follow a well-worn path for Welsh writers in English, taken also by Caradoc Evans, Geraint Goodwin, Arthur Machen, Eiluned Lewis, Emlyn Williams and many others. It was during this period that she met Charles Morgan, a young novelist and dramatic critic for *The Times* and the couple married in 1923. This was to be the second, but most important, literary partnership for Vaughan. Early letters from Morgan describe their marriage as a joint creative endeavour. He writes in 1922, '[o]ur work is one from now onward. If I criticise your work, I'm criticising something that is a part of me.'<sup>15</sup> He informs Vaughan that he

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<sup>13</sup> Letter from Gertrude Painter to Hilda Vaughan. This is also undated but seems to have been written in 1916. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>14</sup> Letter from Charles Morgan to Hilda Vaughan, dated April 13<sup>th</sup>, 1922. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan. This letter is also partially reproduced in Charles Morgan, *Selected Letters of Charles Morgan*, ed. Eiluned Lewis (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 53. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>15</sup> Letter from Charles Morgan to Hilda Vaughan, dated December 8<sup>th</sup>, 1922 in *Selected Letters*, p. 65.

is looking to her 'in the future to batter my plots for me; and I maybe able to help you with the way of telling, and the turn of phrase, and the 'worthwhileness' of the story...'<sup>16</sup>

The extent of Morgan's influence on Vaughan's writing is clear in their correspondence. Morgan heavily edited Vaughan's extremely long manuscripts as he describes in a 1924 letter to her about his work on *The Battle to the Weak*:

After dinner I worked on your novel till bedtime. I have got all I reasonably can out of the Prologue, out of the Gladys section and out of all else except chapter 3 to 8 of Book I which I haven't yet attacked. The result is a reduction to date of 27,000 words – not nearly enough. I may get another 10,000 at the outside of what remains to be done making a total of 37,000 and leaving a final length of at least 120,000. This might just do but I'm afraid it will still be too long.<sup>17</sup>

Vaughan also provided Morgan with guidance but much of her advice has been destroyed. In a note to the novelist Eiluned Lewis, who was gathering correspondence for Morgan's *Selected Letters* (1967), Vaughan explains that her letters were 'full of praise, criticism or comment upon his work' but, to guard their privacy, many have been burned.<sup>18</sup> Both Morgan and Vaughan were keen to collaborate and their letters suggest plans to do so.<sup>19</sup> Others, such as the Welsh writer, Ernest Rhys in 1931 also urged them to write a 'great Welsh realistic romance' together.<sup>20</sup> This never happened but there was frequent borrowing from each other's writing. Vaughan's novel *Pardon and Peace*

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<sup>16</sup> Letter from Charles Morgan to Hilda Vaughan, dated August 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1922 in *Selected Letters*, p. 59.

<sup>17</sup> Letter from Charles Morgan to Hilda Vaughan, dated July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1924. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>18</sup> In an undated inscription on an envelope containing Vaughan's letters to Charles Morgan. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>19</sup> For example, in a letter from Charles Morgan to Hilda Vaughan dated April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1933, Morgan writes: 'I think it would probably be easiest for us to collaborate in a play, but I should like it to be a very big one that would make a whole book in itself. I have often thought that, if we could find the right subject, it ought to be possible to write a play in (say) nine acts. The first three would hang together and stand alone as a separate evening's entertainment.' Similarly in a letter from Vaughan to Morgan, dated April 5<sup>th</sup>, 1936, Vaughan writes: 'Shall we try to continue a story between us, which shall give you the maximum opportunity for poetical prose narrative? That usually seems to me to be your high water mark...' Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>20</sup> Letter from Ernest Rhys to Hilda Vaughan, dated July 10<sup>th</sup>, 1931. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.



(1945) for example, used a title initially intended for Morgan's novel, *The Fountain* (1932), for which, in turn, Vaughan supplied a key scene.<sup>21</sup>

The couple became a formidable literary partnership, as the *Launceston Post* (U.S.A.) reported in 1932:

A husband and wife, both writing novels, is not a very rare ménage, but I think one would have to go a long way back to find a parallel of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Morgan, who both write novels of the very first class. Mrs. Morgan's new novel 'The Soldier and the Gentlewoman,' which appears over her maiden name of Hilda Vaughan, has just been chosen as the book of the month by the Book Society. In February it was her husband's book 'The Fountain' which won that distinction like his previous novel 'Portrait in a Mirror.'<sup>22</sup>

Morgan became something of a literary giant during the first half of the twentieth century and enjoyed a worldwide reputation that it is hard for us to imagine today, since his work has been almost completely forgotten. While he was enthusiastic about his wife's narrative abilities and despite her successes in her own right, there is a suggestion that Vaughan was somewhat in her husband's shadow. In a speech she delivered at The Times Book Exhibition in 1934, for example, she described her husband as an artist and herself as merely a novelist, while several of her letters bear testament to the greater value for the future that she placed on her husband's work.<sup>23</sup>

Like most writers, success did not come to Vaughan immediately. The first piece of work that she attempted to publish was 'Shadow of the Hills', an early and almost intact version of what would later become the novella, *A Thing of Nought*. The tale was rejected by Harper and Brothers in February 1921 because it was 'too short for a book

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<sup>21</sup> See Charles Morgan, *Selected Letters*, letter from Morgan to Roger Barrett, dated May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1929, p. 80, and letter from Morgan to Hilda Vaughan, dated August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1933, p. 113.

<sup>22</sup> *Launceston Post*, April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1932.

<sup>23</sup> Hilda Vaughan in an unpublished speech entitled, 'Why authors are cads', given at the Sunday Times Book Exhibition at Grosvenor House, London on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1934. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

and too long for a Magazine article.’<sup>24</sup> Similar concerns were voiced by W. Robertson Nicoll at *The British Weekly* who advised her instead to write a book.<sup>25</sup> After taking Morgan’s counsel not to publish *The Invader* as her first novel, *The Battle to the Weak* was published by W. Heinemann in 1925 and emerged to rapturous reviews. The *Morning Post* stated, ‘[t]hat this is a “first” novel we only mention now, lest indulgence should seem to be claimed for it on that account. It is young and idealistic, but its poise and finish might come from a practised hand.’<sup>26</sup> The *Weekly Westminster* deemed the novel ‘a sincere and accomplished piece of work.’<sup>27</sup> This was quickly followed by the success of *Here Are Lovers* (1926) and *The Invader* (1928), with the latter described by *Country Life* as ‘one of the best novels of the year’.<sup>28</sup> *Her Father’s House* (1930) won the New Book Guild prize for May 1930 and in 1932 *The Book Society News* announced that ‘The Selected Book for May is *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*.’<sup>29</sup> The following novels, *The Curtain Rises* (1935), *Harvest Home* (1936), *Pardon and Peace* (1945), *Iron and Gold* (1948) and *The Candle and the Light* (1954) were also favourably received, though perhaps without the sense of excitement which accompanied the first five novels. A notable success was Vaughan’s novella, *A Thing of Nought*. A letter from Morgan initially suggested that this early work might be worth revisiting and it was indeed published in 1934 in a striking format devoid of conventional marked paragraphs and accompanied by the illustrations of Lees-Elliott. It was a critical and commercial success and its publisher, Lovat Dickson, was forced to express in the *Bookseller*:

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<sup>24</sup> Letter from Harper and Brothers to Vaughan, dated February 10<sup>th</sup>, 1921. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>25</sup> Letter from W. Robertson Nicoll to Hilda Vaughan, dated February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1921. By kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>26</sup> *Morning Post*, March 6<sup>th</sup>, 1925.

<sup>27</sup> *Weekly Westminster*, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1925.

<sup>28</sup> *Country Life*, August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1928.

<sup>29</sup> *The Book Society News*, May 1932.

his regret to all booksellers for his having been “caught napping” on Christmas Eve by the heavy demands for Hilda Vaughan’s *A Thing of Nought*, price 2s. 6d. net. This was caused by astonishingly good reviews which galvanised bookbuyers to an extent which left the publishers out of print within four days of publication. A large second impression is now in the press.<sup>30</sup>

Vaughan’s novels of the rural Welsh agricultural community seemed to appeal because they were different from the modern and modernist works of her contemporaries. The *Adelphi* (Manchester) in 1935 was impressed by Vaughan’s ability to tell ‘a straightforward story which stands or falls by its intrinsic power and interest and makes no concession to prevailing literary fashions.’<sup>31</sup> Similarly, in the same year, *The Observer* remarked that ‘she chooses impartially from ancient and modern, from the legends of sentimental Victorianism and the methods of “realism” today.’<sup>32</sup> Vaughan also wrote two plays with Laurier Lister, *She, Too, Was Young* and *Forsaking All Other*. While the latter was never published or produced, the former played for three months at Wyndhams Theatre and The New Theatre in London in 1938. Though some mention is made of Vaughan’s plays in chapters two and four of this thesis, there has been little room for a full exploration and this is certainly an avenue that would reward future scholarly examination.

Reviews drew impressive literary comparisons between Vaughan’s work and other authors. Three names are most frequently mentioned. According to the *London Mercury* in 1930, Vaughan’s style ‘has the noble sweep and gesture and comprehensiveness that reminds one of George Eliot’;<sup>33</sup> the *Devon News* in 1930, like

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<sup>30</sup> *Bookseller*, January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1935.

<sup>31</sup> *Adelphi*, February, 1935.

<sup>32</sup> *The Observer*, July 7<sup>th</sup>, 1935.

<sup>33</sup> *London Mercury*, August, 1930.

many other reviews, likened the heroine of *Her Father's House* to 'Hardy's Tess';<sup>34</sup>

while the *New York Times*, also in 1930, remarked that in Vaughan's depiction of

Radnorshire she 'has made this country as much hers as the Brontës did their moors.'<sup>35</sup>

Vaughan's strong heroines and her affection for the countryside that she portrays won her

much admiration, as we will see in chapters four and five of this thesis, respectively. Her

depiction of Wales was of specific interest in the Welsh press and came under close

scrutiny, following on as it did from the negative portraiture in the work of Caradoc

Evans. An article in *The Western Mail* in 1938 lists the various Welsh settings for

Vaughan's novels:

'The Battle to the Weak' is set partly in a remote farmhouse overlooking Builth and partly on the Cardiganshire coast, not far from Cardigan town. The scene of 'Here Are Lovers' is set on the hills above Builth in an old country mansion and one or two farmhouses. The setting of 'The Invaders' [sic] is in the wild stretch of country between Breconshire and Cardiganshire, and that of 'The Soldier and the Gentlewoman' is in Cardiganshire. In 'Her Father's House' she goes to the Wye valley near Erwood, and describes therein a purely imaginary country mansion. For 'A Thing of Naught' [sic] she goes to a valley between the hill country above Abergwesyn.<sup>36</sup>

While *The Invader* was criticised 'for the unkindly light it throws on rural Wales',<sup>37</sup>

depicting as it does the scheming locals' endeavours to rid the valley of an English

incomer, on the whole, Vaughan's novels were met with approval by the Welsh press.

She was seen to inhabit the 'truthful' ground between the 'pretty stories' of Allen Raine

and the 'scabrous piffle' of Caradoc Evans.<sup>38</sup> The *Western Mail* decreed that if 'Hilda

Vaughan were to devote herself entirely to her native heath as the background for her

stories her countrymen would no longer have reason to complain of misrepresentation in

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<sup>34</sup> *Devon News*, August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1930.

<sup>35</sup> *New York Times*, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1930.

<sup>36</sup> *Western Mail*, July 13<sup>th</sup>, 1938.

<sup>37</sup> *Western Mail*, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1928.

<sup>38</sup> Dr. J. Gwenogvryn Evans in *Western Mail*, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1926.

the field of fiction.’<sup>39</sup> This representative, interpretive role places Vaughan in an interesting and complex position which will be investigated in depth in chapter seven of the thesis. Vaughan’s depiction of the rural Welsh, however, was of interest far outside her native country. Reviews suggest that her novels were being read in America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Egypt, India and Sri Lanka, for example.<sup>40</sup>

Vaughan’s considerable success, as well as the connections forged by her husband, saw her move in illustrious circles. Her correspondence reveals her association with several literary groups that reflect different aspects of her identity. In London, Vaughan was part of a vibrant literary scene and corresponded frequently with the influential critic Edward Garnett, who offered advice on her manuscripts and dined with her;<sup>41</sup> George Bernard Shaw, who was ‘dazzled’ by Vaughan’s beauty;<sup>42</sup> and Humbert Wolfe whose letters to the author are copious and congratulatory. The Morgans were also on the periphery of famous literary sets and were invited to dine, for instance, with Virginia and Leonard Woolf.<sup>43</sup> Vaughan also corresponded with many Welsh writers.

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<sup>39</sup> *Western Mail*, May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1932.

<sup>40</sup> All Vaughan’s novels were reviewed in newspapers from many parts of the world. As a brief example, *The Battle to the Weak* (1925) was reviewed in *The Age*, (Melbourne, Australia) April 4<sup>th</sup>, 1925, *Chicago Evening Post*, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 1926; *Her Father’s House* (1930) was reviewed in the *Daily News*, (Colombo, Sri Lanka) June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1930, *Daily Malta Chronicle*, June 6<sup>th</sup>, 1930, *Tasmanian Mail*, (Hobart) July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1930, *Cape Times*, (Cape Town) August 1<sup>st</sup>, 1930, *Standard*, (Buenos Aires) August 26<sup>th</sup>, 1930; *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* (1932) was reviewed in *Irish Times*, (Dublin) May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1932, *Daily Mail and Empire*, (Toronto, Canada) June 18<sup>th</sup>, 1932, *Rhodesia Herald*, (Salisbury), July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1932, *New Zealand Herald*, (Auckland) July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1932; *The Curtain Rises* (1935) was reviewed in *Egyptian Gazette*, (Alexandria) July 18<sup>th</sup>, 1935, *Madras Mail* August 24<sup>th</sup>, 1935.

<sup>41</sup> For example, a letter from Edward Garnett to Vaughan dated January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1931 offers advice on *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* and a letter dated September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1932 invites Vaughan to tea. By kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>42</sup> Letter from George Bernard Shaw to Vaughan dated July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1927. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>43</sup> Undated letter from Virginia Woolf to Vaughan. By kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

Ernest Rhys wrote poems which he sent to her;<sup>44</sup> Geraint Goodwin promises to visit;<sup>45</sup> W. S. Gwynn Williams writes with ideas about his novels and expresses his desire to write a musical with her;<sup>46</sup> and the critic R. Ellis Roberts of the *New Statesman* sustains a long correspondence with Vaughan, urging her to ignore the advice given by Edward Garnett.<sup>47</sup> Enduring friendships are evinced by the hundreds of letters from Stanley Bligh who provides news from Vaughan's native locality; and Richard Vaughan, who dedicated his novel *Moulded in Earth* (1951) to Vaughan, writing, '[i]t is only right and fitting that my finest work should be dedicated to you.'<sup>48</sup> Other women writers also feature prominently in Vaughan's correspondence. There is an invitation to dine with Vera Brittain,<sup>49</sup> undated notes from Rebecca West, letters of thanks from Elizabeth Bowen,<sup>50</sup> many letters from Rose Macaulay and the Welsh female novelist, Eiluned Lewis, and evidence of a close lifelong friendship forged with Margaret Storm Jameson. Most striking in the exchanges between Vaughan and her female literary contemporaries is their shared difficulty in juggling the conflicting obligations of writing and domesticity. The Welsh novelist, Elisabeth Inglis-Jones, finds her noisy home 'most devitalising and

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<sup>44</sup> For example, in a letter from Ernest Rhys to Vaughan dated September 18<sup>th</sup>, 1928, Rhys includes poems he has written to Vaughan entitled, 'Quintain' and 'The Golden Ode.' By kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>45</sup> In a letter from Geraint Goodwin to Hilda Vaughan dated February 14<sup>th</sup>, 1937, Goodwin writes, 'I much appreciated your tribute and look forward to seeing you and Charles again. Friday then ...' Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>46</sup> Letter from W. S. Gwynn Williams dated September 12<sup>th</sup>, 1919. By kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>47</sup> He does this for example in a letter dated January 30<sup>th</sup>, 1932.

<sup>48</sup> Letter from Richard Vaughan to Hilda Vaughan, dated Oct 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1960. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan. Since the novel was published in 1951, I think that this must refer to its reissue.

<sup>49</sup> Letter from Vera Brittain to Vaughan dated only September 8<sup>th</sup>. By kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>50</sup> For example in a letter from Elizabeth Bowen to Vaughan dated January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1933, Bowen thanks Vaughan for her letter about *To the North* (1932): 'Not just kind words but real understanding does mean a lot – as you who must know.' Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

inconducive to writing the novel I'm always trying to begin!!';<sup>51</sup> and Margaret Storm Jameson, in reply to complaints voiced by Vaughan, writes, 'I think your babies dashed lucky to have a mother who writes books and feeds them. Most mothers who manage one fail lamentably in the other, and I believe that book-writing is as important to babies as the other.'<sup>52</sup> The dual ties of art and domesticity are explored by Vaughan in *The Curtain Rises* and *The Candle and the Light* and are examined in chapter two of the thesis.

Vaughan's class position meant that she could employ domestic help and could temporarily escape the ties of domesticity to retreat to Wales for a few months at a time in order to write her novels. The author found it very difficult to write in London and would spend a few months of almost every year in various parts of Wales, staying with friends or relatives (such as her elder sister, Elizabeth, in Laugharne) or renting properties and it was here that she did the greater part of her work.<sup>53</sup> Though her permanent residence was in London for most of her life, it was in the Welsh countryside that Vaughan did almost all her writing. The exception was during the Second World War when Vaughan and her children, Shirley and Roger, moved to America from 1939 to 1943. They stayed first of all with the professor of economics and friend of Charles Morgan, Patrick Murphy Malin, but moved around the country several times, staying also in California and South Carolina, for instance. During this time Vaughan also spent several months in the Mac Dowell writers' colony in New Hampshire. Letters suggest that Vaughan was not entirely happy during her years in America. A friend, Susan Porter, from Big Sur, California, writes of Vaughan's longing for her native country, 'exiled

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<sup>51</sup> Letter from Elisabeth Inglis-Jones to Vaughan, dated only December 2<sup>nd</sup>. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>52</sup> Letter from Margaret Storm Jameson to Vaughan, dated, August 5<sup>th</sup>, 1926. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>53</sup> See chapter five of this thesis for further details.

from your own Wild Wales', and this perhaps, partially explains the almost emblazoned Welsh landscape and legend in *Iron and Gold* (explored in chapters five and six of the thesis) of which Vaughan wrote the majority in America.<sup>54</sup>

After Vaughan's final published novel, *The Candle and the Light*, appeared in 1954, the author began to work on a new novel which in her letters she affectionately refers to as 'Etty'. Her surviving letters to Charles Morgan in 1955 refer to her progress on the new work and a letter from her American publishers, Duell, Sloane and Pearce, offer the encouraging remark that while her 'progress, though slow, both in strength and achievement with HENRIETTA is unquestionably sure. Best of all is the word of the plot you have developed for a novel to follow Henrietta's three volumes.' On the margins of this missive, however, Vaughan has noted, "'Etty" – poor old thing! *Still* unfinished in 1964!!! H.V.'<sup>55</sup> She would never publish any new work. The 1950s and 1960s seem to have been a time of disappointment for Vaughan, suggested in the many rejection letters from publishers who refused to reissue her most successful novels.<sup>56</sup> Despite a televised adaptation of *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* by the B.B.C. in January 1957, there was little interest in Vaughan's writing during this period. The last critical analysis of her work for some time was Gustav Felix Adam's *Three Contemporary Anglo-Welsh Novelists: Jack Jones, Rhys Davies and Hilda Vaughan* in 1950. While Adam expresses his admiration of Vaughan's lyrical writing, the comparison between her and her male

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<sup>54</sup> Undated letter from Susan Porter, High Pastures, Big Sur, California to Hilda Vaughan. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>55</sup> Letter from Duell, Sloane and Pearce, Inc. New York, to Vaughan dated September 30<sup>th</sup>, 1955.

<sup>56</sup> For example, a letter from Marjorie Villiers at The Harville Press Ltd. dated December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1962 rejects *A Thing of Nought* for reissue; a letter from Macmillan and Co., dated January 18<sup>th</sup>, 1963 also rejects *A Thing of Nought*; and a letter to Vaughan's friend, Anne Dearden from Penguin Books, dated March 21<sup>st</sup>, 1961 reads: 'Mr Goodwin asks me to say that he has considered the possibility of including some of Hilda Vaughan's books in the Penguin list, but is extremely sorry that he does not feel he would be able to fit any of these into our very full programme at present...' Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.



contemporaries paints an unflattering gendered view of the relationship between the work of the three writers. While Jones and Davies are celebrated for their ‘realism’ and link with a locality, Adam remarks that ‘in Hilda Vaughan, the element of factual reporting was never present at all, and her connection with the region is less obvious than in either of the previous two writers ... She draws largely on childhood memories as a stimulus for her imagination and is essentially a novelist of sensitive feminine feeling.’<sup>57</sup> The gendered links with female sentimentality and childlike writing distorts what is otherwise a useful overview of her work. Adam also draws attention to Vaughan’s class, which, he argues, distances her work from the other two male writers:

Personally, as well as in her novels, Hilda Vaughan belongs to another sphere of Welsh life. While the former take their material from the world of the miners and the lower middle classes, she is at home in the country houses and on the farms. But with her the social aspect is not prominent and we hear little of the economic side of life.<sup>58</sup>

Vaughan’s class was also the reason for her abrupt dismissal in another work of criticism during the 1960s. In *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* by Glyn Jones, Vaughan is dispatched, in parenthesis, in the space of a sentence: ‘Nigel Heseltine is one of the few Anglo-Welsh (Richard Hughes, E. Inglis-Jones, Hilda Vaughan and “Twm Teg” are others) who write about the squirearchy and its anglicised apers.’<sup>59</sup> While Vaughan’s class does indeed inform her work and distances her from Welsh experience in its mass forms, here, it is her failure as a ‘representative’ writer that excludes her work from discussion. This is an important point and one which will be pursued further in the conclusion to this thesis. It reflects a tendency in much analysis of Welsh writing in

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<sup>57</sup> G. F. Adam, *Three Contemporary Anglo-Welsh Novelists: Jack Jones, Rhys Davies and Hilda Vaughan* (Bern, Switzerland: A. Francke AG., 1950), p. 103. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, p. 29.

<sup>59</sup> Glyn Jones, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues: Essays on Anglo-Welsh Writers and Writing* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1968), p. 42.

English during this period, and for a long time to follow, to focus predominantly on the male, working-class narratives of the South Wales valleys, leading to the neglect of many other authors, including female, rural writers like Vaughan.

The next critical exploration of Vaughan's work did not appear until 1981, four years before the author's death. Christopher W. Newman's contribution on Vaughan for the Writers of Wales Series, edited by Meic Stephens and R. Brinley Jones, provides much useful biographical and background knowledge, as well as a full bibliography of her work and placed Vaughan's work in the critical arena once more. Though there was little mention of Vaughan's work in critical debate for the next few years, during the 1980s and 1990s the academic study of the field of Anglo-Welsh fiction found new vigour with critics such as M. Wynn Thomas, Tony Brown, Jane Aaron, Stephen Knight, Katie Gramich, Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, Tony Conran, Raymond Garlick, Catherine Brennan, Roland Mathias<sup>60</sup> and many others giving new readings and illuminating the work of many forgotten Welsh authors writing in English. Particularly pertinent to this study is the work of scholars researching in the field of Welsh women's writing, an area that had suffered long critical neglect and of which Hilda Vaughan was one of a great many literary casualties. In 1991 the publication of interdisciplinary essays in *Our Mother's Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History 1830-1939*, edited by Angela V. John, went some way in redressing this dearth of information and was succeeded in 1994 by *Our Sisters' Land*, edited by Jane Aaron, Teresa Rees, Sandra Betts and Moira Vincentelli and *Our Daughters' Land* (1996), edited by Sandra Betts. An invaluable contribution to the field has also been given by Ursula Masson and Deirdre Beddoe in

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<sup>60</sup> See Roland Mathias, *Anglo-Welsh Literature: An Illustrated History* (Bridgend: Poetry Wales Press, 1987), p. 90 of which has a photograph of Hilda Vaughan.

their work on the forgotten history of women in Wales. Beddow's 2000 work, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth-Century Wales* has provided a useful background to Vaughan's work in the research of this thesis. Moira Dearnley's *Distant Fields: Essays in Eighteenth Century Fictions of Wales* (2001) extended knowledge of Welsh writing to a period that had previously been sorely neglected. During the writing of this thesis, several seminal works have also emerged, such as Jane Aaron's *Nineteenth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Nation, Gender and Identity* (2007) which surveys the fiction in both English and Welsh of this period and explores the relationship between women writers and the nation. Katie Gramich's survey, *Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging* (2007), looks in particular at the relationship between women and the Welsh landscape and pays considerable attention to Vaughan's novels.<sup>61</sup> The same year saw the publication of Linden Peach's *Contemporary Irish and Welsh Women's Fiction: Gender, Desire and Power* which is the first comparative study of women's fiction in Wales, Ireland and Northern Ireland.

It is as part of this new critical consciousness of Welsh women's writing that Hilda Vaughan's work has been re-examined in this thesis. The Welsh women's press, Honno, in their Honno Classics series, has been responsible for the literary resurrection of many Welsh female writers such as Amy Dillwyn, Allen Raine, Menna Gallie, Margiad Evans, Eiluned Lewis, Lily Tobias, Bertha Thomas and others. In 1999 this series published *A View Across the Valley: Short Stories by Women from Wales c. 1850-1950*, edited by Jane Aaron, in which Vaughan's novella, *A Thing of Nought*, appeared. It is poignant that this work was the first of Vaughan's to reappear after her death as she

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<sup>61</sup> See Katie Gramich, *Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Land, Gender, Belonging* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), pp. 63-6, 97-8.

had tried so hard to ensure its re-issue during the 1960s. *Iron and Gold* was republished by Honno in 2002 with an insightful introduction by Jane Aaron who provides a feminist reading of Vaughan's retelling of the Welsh legend of Llyn-y-Fan-Fach. This sparked a new critical examination of Vaughan's work. In 2004 Stephen Knight included Vaughan in his postcolonial reading of Welsh writing in English, *A Hundred Years of Fiction*. In 2005 an excellent essay by Jeni Williams explored the relationship between nation, gender and postcolonialism in Vaughan's novels and compared this with the ideological positioning of fellow Welsh female writer, Allen Raine.<sup>62</sup> Williams offers a particularly illuminating reading of Vaughan's relationship with Englishness and how the view of England as a centre or a periphery changes in Vaughan's work. Diana Wallace, in 2007, examined *Iron and Gold* alongside Margiad Evans' *Country Dance* (1932) and Eiluned Lewis' *The Captain's Wife* (1943), looking at the interplay between gender and nationality in historical novels by Welsh women writers. The essay convincingly reads *Iron and Gold* as a tale 'about the loss to all when otherness is suppressed or erased.'<sup>63</sup> Most of this new critical analysis of Vaughan's work has explored aspects of gender and nation in her novels and it is against this background that my own study appears. Issues of gender are constantly explored in Vaughan's work and almost all the chapters of this thesis pay particular attention to constructions of gender, especially femininity, in her novels. Chapter four of the thesis is dedicated solely to the portrayal of women in her

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<sup>62</sup> Jeni Williams, 'The Intertexts of Literary History: "Gender" and Welsh Writing', *European Intertexts: Women's Writing in English in a European Context*, eds. Patsy Stoneman and Ana María Sánchez-Arce with Angela Leighton (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 156-176.

<sup>63</sup> Diana Wallace, "'Mixed Marriages': three Welsh historical novels in English by women writers', *Moment of Earth: Poems and Essays in Honour of Jeremy Hooker*, ed. Christopher Meredith (Aberystwyth: Celtic Studies Publications, 2007), pp. 171-184 (p. 178).

work and looks at the interplay between contemporary feminism and Vaughan's female figures.

While the study takes a largely contextual approach, in some of the following chapters the use of postcolonial theory has proved an illuminating and enriching means of reading Vaughan's novels and the various ways in which they construct identity/identities. In employing this literary theory (or rather collection of theories) I am following in the vibrant and groundbreaking work of critics such as Stephen Knight, whose previously mentioned book *A Hundred Years of Fiction* (2004) brought the interpretation of Welsh fiction in English as a 'post-colonial' literature to the fore. Soon afterwards Kirsti Bohata's *Postcolonialism Revisited* (2004) developed further the relationship between Welsh fiction in English and postcolonialism, as she explored the thematic concerns of the theory which are found, self-consciously or otherwise, in many Welsh Anglophone novels. However, the use of postcolonial theory in relation to Welsh fiction in English has been a contentious issue that has sparked passionate debate amongst academics. The most prominent argument against the use of this theory has come from historians who argue against the validity of viewing Wales simplistically as a colonial/post-colonial nation. Such objections include those voiced by Dai Smith, who argues that the Acts of Union 1536-43 cannot be interpreted as straightforward acts of colonialism due to the powers and privileges that they also bestowed on the Welsh. Instead, he highlights the 'process of legal equalisation' that they brought about. Another refutation is based on his assertion that Wales was never a unified country before the Acts of Union took place.<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, the fiercely contentious debate of whether

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<sup>64</sup> See Dai Smith, 'Psycho-Colonialism', *New Welsh Review*, 66 (Winter 2004), 22-29 (26, 28). A counter argument is given by Jane Aaron in 'Postcolonial Change', *New Welsh Review*, 67 (Spring 2005), 32-36.

Wales can be seen in post-colonial or postcolonial terms highlights many of the tensions that characterise a postcolonial culture according to Homi K. Bhabha. The vehemently opposing viewpoints are reminiscent of his model of the split nation:

The problem is not simply the 'selfhood' of the Nation as opposed to the otherness of other nations. We are confronted with the Nation split within itself, articulating the heterogeneity of its population. The barred Nation *It / Self*, alienated from its eternal self-generation, becomes a liminal signifying space, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonist authorities and tense locations of cultural difference.<sup>65</sup>

As Bohata acknowledges, the 'problems of any such postcolonial model are evident in the case of Wales, whose history and literature in no way conform to the progressive-linear model of moving from colonization (and colonial literature) to decolonization (and postcolonial literature).'<sup>66</sup> Contributing further to the debate, *Postcolonial Wales* (2005), edited by Jane Aaron and Chris Williams, is a collection of essays that evaluate the pertinence and usefulness of examining Welsh culture and politics in the light of postcolonialism. In the first essay Chris Williams concludes that while Wales cannot be viewed as 'post-colonial' (a nation in a period after colonialism) it can be referred to as 'postcolonial' due to the sustained presence of the tropes of postcolonialism in many facets of its culture.<sup>67</sup>

This thesis does not purport to contribute to the politico-historical debate of Wales as a (post-)colonial nation; instead, it is the second of Williams' suggestions that provides the focus for analysis. Vaughan's relationship with Wales was a complex and constantly evolving one, which colours the construction of identity in her novels. Postcolonial theory can help untangle some of the interweaving threads of identity in her work.

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<sup>65</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 148.

<sup>66</sup> Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Cardiff University of Wales Press, 2004), pp. 2-3.

<sup>67</sup> See Chris Williams, 'Problematizing Wales: An Exploration in Historiography and Postcoloniality', *Postcolonial Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), pp. 3-22.

Conversely, Vaughan's work is also most interesting when it resists such conceptual disentanglement, revealing how the paradigms of postcolonial theory do not work to unpick the tensions within the novels. Several concepts of postcolonialism lend themselves particularly well to the discussion of Vaughan and her work. The first of these notions is hybridity. The author could herself be seen as the product of (the rather uneasy biological/racial idea of) hybridity, born to a Welsh father and Scottish mother. More fruitful, however, is the ideological positioning of Vaughan and her work as a border writer, inhabiting the liminal space in which English and Welsh identities intersect. The idea of cultural hybridity is explored in many different ways in Vaughan's work. It can be seen in the various border crossings and re-crossings frequently made by her characters as many of the plots are dually based in England and Wales. It can also be seen in the numerous relationships, particularly of the romantic kind, between Welsh and English characters. In one such relationship between the Welsh heroine, Nest, and her English suitor, Julian, in *The Curtain Rises*, their love leads to a questioning of the contemporary significance of the border itself. As Nest informs her lover, 'I don't see why I should detest *you*, in this year of grace, because some remote ancestor of yours may possibly have chopped off the right hand of one of mine, when he came marauding over Offa's Dyke.'<sup>68</sup> Vaughan's novels are also frequently set in the county of Radnorshire, an area that experienced early and thorough Anglicisation, rendering it a hybridised location.

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<sup>68</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Curtain Rises* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 220. All further references are to this edition.

Duality was also central to Vaughan's own identity, in her marriage to the English novelist and playwright Charles Morgan and in her ties to both London and Wales.<sup>69</sup>

Another postcolonial concept pertinent to Vaughan's writing is ambivalence, described by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin as 'the complex mix of attraction and repulsion that characterises the relationship between colonizer and colonized. The relationship is ambivalent because the colonized subject is never simply and completely opposed to the colonizer.'<sup>70</sup> This notion goes even further in illuminating the relationships between the English and Welsh discussed above but is also an effective description of the shifting relationship with England and Englishness in the texts, as Vaughan constantly negotiates and renegotiates similarity and difference with the neighbouring country in her novels. This is particularly evident in her use and portrayal of Welsh and English language and dialect, which is discussed in detail in chapter seven of the thesis. In a similar vein, Vaughan's narrative positioning can be read as ambivalent in the author's 'interpretation' of Wales, with an acute awareness of her English audience. This is further complicated by the anglicising influence of her class position, which renders her an intermediary between the Welsh people that she writes about and the English audience with whom she is inextricably linked.

As Kirsti Bohata has argued, the established tropes of postcolonial theory also come unstuck when applied to the complex situation in Wales:

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<sup>69</sup> Morgan was actually of Welsh descent and his relatives could be traced to Pembrokeshire. I refer to him as English, however, because his upbringing was English and this seems to have been how he perceived his own national identity.

<sup>70</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 12-13.



The reliance on simplistic binaries which place Wales on the side of the colonisers, thereby ignoring the possibility of complex and unequal dynamics of power within the British Isles is inadequate.<sup>71</sup>

She makes a case for the development of postcolonial theory to recognise degrees of difference and complexity which do not rely on the binaries of black/white, east/west, third world/first world that make the view of Wales as postcolonial untenable. Vaughan's novels show precisely how the binaries of postcolonial theory fail in this way. With sophisticated understanding as well as in much less conscious and measured ways, Vaughan navigates the complex interplay between the Welsh, British and English identities in her work. Nowhere is this more apparent than in her depiction of war, examined closely in chapter three of this thesis. As we have seen, the First World War in particular played a formative role in Vaughan's early adulthood, and, along with the Second World War, was instrumental in constructing and reconstructing Welsh and British identities for Vaughan, for Wales and the United Kingdom as a whole. While Vaughan is largely supportive of this unifying British identity (which becomes 'English' in linguistic slippages), in her 1945 novel, *Pardon and Peace* in particular, she also alludes to the painful sacrifice of Welsh identity that must be made in order to adopt it. Again, Vaughan's own class position also disrupts postcolonial binaries as the oppressor/oppressed dichotomy cannot sustain Vaughan's Welsh identity alongside her membership of a dominant group within an oppressive class hierarchy (with its aforementioned connotations of anglicisation). In addition, postcolonial theory can prioritise national or colonial identity to the detriment of other identities. Vaughan's work is sensitive to the participation of national narratives in the marginalisation of the female members of the very nation that they attempt to construct. This is a prominent thematic

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<sup>71</sup> Kirsti Bohata, 'Psycho-Colonialism Revisited', *New Welsh Review*, 69 (Autumn 2005), 31-39 (34-5).

concern (examined closely in chapter two of the thesis) in *The Curtain Rises* and *The Candle and the Light* which highlight the problematic relationship between their nationality and gender experienced by two Welsh female writers.

The complex construction of identity in Vaughan's novels provides the focus for this thesis. Vaughan herself had a strong sense of her Welsh identity, though, as we have seen, this was not without its conflicting ties to Britishness, class and gender. Her writing emerged during a century that saw important events in the shaping of Welsh identity; beginning with the collapse of the Cymru Fydd movement (though not its ideals), the establishment of Plaid Cymru in 1925, coinciding with the publication of Vaughan's first novel, and ending in devolution for Wales. Vaughan was not a Welsh nationalist but her novels, sometimes surprisingly, raise similar issues to those raised by the movement and she shows sympathy for, though not always agreement with, Welsh nationalist characters. In *The Curtain Rises* the Welsh female writer, Nest, vows 'to let whatever is national in me, in the least restricted sense, break out in the poetry that is in our blood'.<sup>72</sup> This national identity in 'the least restricted sense' goes some way to describe the construction of Welshness in Vaughan's work. In the novels there is a developing sense of national identity that slowly shifts in its perspective. This gradual change is reflected in the structure of the thesis. In Vaughan's early work there is a strong sense of a Welsh narrative voice that is looking outwards into the wider world, which, by the later novels, has become the voice of exile looking back towards Wales, eager to re-forge connections with its landscape, culture and traditions.

The first chapter examines the curious allusions to the ideas and language of Social Darwinism and anthropology in Vaughan's work, particularly in *The Battle to the*

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<sup>72</sup> Vaughan, *The Curtain Rises*, p. 424.

*Weak.* Here, Vaughan is exploring ideas which are also depicted in the novels of many contemporary and earlier English and American authors, such as Edith Wharton, Thomas Hardy, Virginia Woolf and D. H. Lawrence, but their inclusion in a Welsh setting has particularly interesting implications for Welsh identity. In this early work the author examines issues that had worldwide pertinence, and applies them to her native country. The second chapter explores the depiction of the rapidly expanding Anglo-American mass culture industries and their effect on Welsh identity in her novels. These first two chapters show Vaughan's work engaging with contemporary culture, displaying a Welsh perspective that is looking outwards towards international concerns. Chapter three evaluates Vaughan's depiction of war and its construction of a unified Britishness at the expense of Welsh identity, a situation that Vaughan seems largely to endorse, though there are suggestions of dissent that disrupt this unified identity. Vaughan's many negative portraits of female figures are the focus of chapter four, in contrast with her idealised heroines. Though her portrayal of female characters seems to betray an anti-feminist agenda, her strong heroines point to a particularly Welsh construction of feminism in Vaughan's work that links the author to other Welsh women writers. Here, she looks back to Wales for idealised values that she does not find in metropolitan London. Chapter five examines Vaughan's depiction of the Welsh landscape, which evokes a sense of longing and romanticism, replacing the engagement with contemporary issues and social consciousness of her earlier work. This is accompanied by her retreat into the past, depicted in the exploration of Vaughan's use of folk culture in chapter six. Both these chapters examine Vaughan's lamentation for forgotten things, her endeavour to reconnect with a 'lost' Welsh identity and her textual attempt to preserve the past.

There is often in Vaughan's work, however, hope for the future symbolised in a new generation, to whom, in a recurring theme, land, traditions and culture are passed on, though, as we will see in chapter six, often in altered forms. Finally, chapter seven looks at Vaughan's use of Welsh and English language and Radnorshire dialect and how they construct difference and similarity in her novels. It also examines Vaughan's own ideological position as an author in relation to her numerous 'audiences'. In her use of language, Vaughan attempts to bridge the cultural divide in Wales caused by its two languages, but the unified identity, as we shall see, is not one in which she herself can fully share, since the narrative voice is distanced from the Wales that it portrays. This distance and proximity brings us back to the image of Vaughan alluded to at the beginning of this introduction. Vaughan's vision of Wales is certainly one of the solitary figure. There is much affection and understanding in her depiction of her native country, even when a sense of belonging is not always quite within her reach. Though hers is not always a depiction of Wales and Welshness that is representative of a large group in Welsh society, her work offers a fascinating glimpse into a particular Wales that contributes to the view of the vibrant plurality of Welsh identity.

## Chapter One

### **‘That’s how we do grow from ape to savage, and from savage to civilized man’: Social Darwinism and Anthropology in the Novels of Hilda Vaughan**

When Hilda Vaughan’s first novel, *The Battle to the Weak*, was published in 1925, Darwin’s theory of evolution by natural selection was over sixty-five years old. The intervening years had seen *The Origin of Species* (1859) drastically transform and defamiliarise perceptions of the world and humanity’s place within it. The work of Social Darwinists developed the theory of evolution, exploring how its implications could be harnessed for the advancement of humankind. Thomas Huxley, for example, promoted genetic artificial selection by man in *Evolution and Ethics* (1894). This was taken a step further by Sir Frances Galton, founder of the Eugenics Society in 1908, which sought to control human reproduction to produce a healthier, more civilized and racially ‘elevated’ society.<sup>73</sup> Its advocates included many prominent female figures, such as Marie Stopes, whose campaign for contraception for working-class women in particular, was associated with the organization. Along with the increasingly prominent anthropological works of Sir James G. Frazer and Franz Boas, the new ‘life sciences’ were sources of immense interest among the intelligentsia at the *fin de siècle*. Grant Allen observed in 1889 that ‘everybody nowadays talks about evolution. Like electricity, the cholera germ, women’s rights, the great mining boom, and the Eastern Question, it is “in the air.”’<sup>74</sup> It is unsurprising, then, that literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries takes

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<sup>73</sup> The organisation was originally called the Eugenics Education Society in 1908 before changing its name to the Eugenics Society in 1926.

<sup>74</sup> Grant Allen, *Falling in Love, with other Essays on More Exact Branches of Science*, quoted in Angelique Richardson, ‘The Life Sciences: “Everybody nowadays talks about evolution”’, *A Concise Companion to Modernism*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 6-33 (p. 6).

stock of these ideas. References to the life sciences can be found in the work of Thomas Hardy, Edith Wharton, Virginia Woolf and D.H. Lawrence, for example. These concepts are also evaluated in *The Battle to the Weak* (1925), *Her Father's House* (1930) and *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* (1932) by Hilda Vaughan, in which they are addressed in the setting of the rural Welsh countryside. Interestingly, evolutionary theory had a little-known connection with Wales. According to Geraint H. Jenkins, few people are aware that one contributor to the theory was a Welshman:

During his travels in Papua New Guinea, Usk-born Alfred Russel Wallace, one of the most progressive scientists in mid-Victorian Wales, had formulated by 1858 (independently of Charles Darwin) the interpretation of life as a catalogue of successful errors within the framework of gradual evolutionary change.<sup>75</sup>

Despite the Welsh role in the inception of some of its theories, the allusions to the life sciences in Vaughan's work have a very different resonance in her novels than in those of her English and American contemporaries. When examined in a Welsh context, Social Darwinism and anthropology have far-reaching postcolonial implications which colour Vaughan's construction of identity in her texts.

## I

In a letter to the novelist Rosemary Sutcliff, Vaughan reveals that she was familiar with at least one of the major texts of the life sciences. She writes that she has read James G. Frazer's seminal work of anthropology, *The Golden Bough* (1890), and discusses the Welsh races in anthropological terms.<sup>76</sup> She refers to the 'little dark people' of Wales as 'the original inhabitants of these islands, supplanted by the tall red-headed Celtic breed to

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<sup>75</sup> Geraint H. Jenkins, *A Concise History of Wales* at: <http://assets.cambridge.org/97805218/excerpt/9780521823678.excerpt.pdf>. (accessed September 11th, 2008).

<sup>76</sup> Letter from Hilda Vaughan to Rosemary Sutcliff, dated November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1963. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

which I myself belong.’ She goes on to compare the Welsh to the Ancient Greeks, whose, ‘legends are strangely familiar’, mirroring the comparative links made between ‘primitive’ peoples in anthropological writing. Vaughan and her husband, Charles Morgan, were also part of literary and social circles that included keen members and sympathisers of the Eugenics society, such as George Bernard Shaw, while Morgan’s correspondents included Marie Stopes, though it should be noted that the Morgans themselves were never members of the organisation.<sup>77</sup> An early interest in evolutionary theory and how it determines the behaviour of her characters is displayed in Vaughan’s juvenilia. A series of unpublished sketches depicts a Radnorshire farmer, David Owen, who explains the customs and stories of the locality to the narrator, a gentleman visiting from London, in a literary parallel with the anthropological study of exotic natives. In one sketch, named ‘How “A Man is Having to Fight for His Own”’ (the title echoing the Darwinistic principle of survival), David points out that, just as young buzzards in a nest fight for food, ‘[m]en is the very same.’<sup>78</sup> He tells the Englishman that local shepherds fight to drive their sheep onto the best land and often come to blows. This prefigures the opening scene of *The Invader* (1928) in which Daniel Evans chases a shepherd who has been coursing his sheep.<sup>79</sup> As Daniel explains, it is ‘the strong man’ who prospers in the harsh agricultural life, using ‘only the strength and wit to take summat from others’ (p. 35). In her juvenilia, Vaughan sees the concept of the survival of the fittest played out in

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<sup>77</sup> For example, Morgan’s correspondence contains a letter from Marie Stopes dated May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1954.

<sup>78</sup> Hilda Vaughan in collaboration with Gertrude Painter, ‘How “A Man is having to fight for his own”’, part of Vaughan’s unpublished and uncatalogued juvenilia. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>79</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Invader* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1928), p. 7. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

the arduous existence of the agricultural communities that she portrays and, as we will see, it is an idea that she frequently returns to in her later work.

The most explicit references to evolutionary theory in Vaughan's work are made in *The Battle to the Weak*. The hero of the novel, Rhys, becomes aware of Darwin's ideas as a young man. They help to trigger an intellectual awakening in him that results in his development into a social reformer who can view Wales and its ills from a detached theoretical perspective and attempt to improve them. As the young Rhys courts his sweetheart, Esther, '[h]e tried to explain to her the evolutionary theories contained in the books he had read,' informing her of 'how we do grow from ape to savage, and from savage to civilized man'.<sup>80</sup> Many years later Rhys displays the belief, shared with Darwin, in the importance of competition. Observing the animals at a livestock show in the county market-town, he remarks that contest is:

a condition of life, of progress - a necessary stimulant. Where there's no contest there's stagnation ... The problem of civilization, it seems to me, is how to maintain competition between races and individuals whilst eliminating its present cruelty. (p. 264)

The perspective of his remark is particularly interesting. Again, placed in this context of a rural agricultural show, Vaughan shows how evolutionary theory is implicit in the life of the Radnorshire farming community and relates this to its ramifications in the wider world. The issue is addressed from a Welsh perspective that looks outwards.

While the life sciences are explicitly depicted in *The Battle to the Weak*, in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* Vaughan engages with the ideas of Social Darwinism in a more subtle, allusive manner and connects them with social class. The plot of the novel rests upon principles of the preservation of a genetic type and inheritance, the latter of

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<sup>80</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Battle to the Weak*, (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1925), p. 64. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.



which is a recurring theme in Vaughan's work. The Einon-Thomases are a Welsh aristocratic family continually referred to as a 'race' or a 'people', which occasionally creates an elision that invites a reading of them as representative of the Welsh themselves.<sup>81</sup> Following the death of his cousins in the First World War, the Einon-Thomas estate is inherited by an Englishman, Dick, who feels compelled to marry its incumbent, his cousin Gwenllian. She is preoccupied with the continuation of her family line and is determined to produce an heir. As she explains, '[i]t seems to me so base to be the weak link in a long chain - the first poor soft thing to let it break' (p. 70). While the preservation of the bloodline passes on a genetic inheritance, the couple live in an estate described as a 'family museum' (p. 29), full of heirlooms, which are the material accumulated inheritance of previous generations. As Dick notes, on the dining room walls there 'were many portraits in oils of dark handsome folk, evidently [Gwenllian's] ancestors' (p. 28). The antiques also provide a reminder that the family have had to compete with other 'races' and fight for the continuation of their own, as Dick 'saw with sharpened perception ... the trophies of chase and battle which displayed his family credit' (p. 140). The words 'chase and battle' simultaneously evoke upper class pursuits, such as hunting for sport and military interests but also suggest something atavistic and primitive, such as hunting for food and the fight for survival. In her juxtaposition of these ideas, Vaughan was reproducing the dominant concepts that had been connected with evolutionary theory and Social Darwinism. Marx read *The Origin of Species* itself as employing the analogy of social class. He observes that,

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<sup>81</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1932), pp. 45, 53. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

[i]t is remarkable how Darwin recognizes among beasts and plants his own English society with its division of labour, competition, opening-up new markets, 'inventions', and the Malthusian 'struggle for existence.'<sup>82</sup>

A frequently occurring trope in Vaughan's texts is the decay of the landed classes and the rise of intelligent members of the working class.<sup>83</sup> In *The Invader* Daniel Evans ponders the 'decline from wealth and power' of the aristocracy which he considers to be 'a defeated class' (p. 195) while his own is 'going up' (p. 2). This is reminiscent of Hardy's *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891), which is also a novel that explores ideas of racial degeneracy, in which the aristocratic family of the title have fallen, only to be replaced by the rising trade family, the Stoke-d'Urbervilles. Similarly, Rhys in *The Battle to the Weak* attributes the decline of the gentry to their inability to adapt, their lack of Darwinian fitness to survive. While explaining evolutionary theory to Esther, he mentions that, 'the country gentries is mostly ruined here. Move with the times or go under, I do say, and move they 'ouldn't' (p. 65). Here, Vaughan uses the ideas generated by the life sciences to make sense of contemporary society in her novels.

While Darwin's theory helps to explain the disruption of the old social order in Vaughan's texts, it also undermines the supremacy of religion. The effect that evolutionary theory had in discrediting religious creationism is portrayed in *The Battle to the Weak*. This is illustrated as Rhys tells Esther that he has fallen out of favour with Mr. Evans, the curate of Cwmbach:

Lendin' me books on geology, and takin' me to see fossils as he'd found here and there about the cliffs, he was. Well that set me thinkin' as the Bible account o' creation couldn't be true, though he seemed not to doubt it. (p. 63)

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<sup>82</sup> Karl Marx quoted by Gillian Beer in *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 58.

<sup>83</sup> This is explored further in the conclusion to this thesis.

Rhys's religion is replaced with science. As he observes his dour Methodist relatives, he reflects that,

[t]hey are sad and sour... because they are worshippin' an old God – the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob – a jealous and revengeful tribal deity. But I am glad in my heart, for I am worshippin' the new God of Evolution as is makin' my love for Esther and my hope of our children part of His service.  
(p. 104)

Evolutionary theory becomes a new religion for Rhys and he aligns Christianity with a pagan belief of a backward people. While Rhys's reaction to this transition is positive, his enthusiasm is not entirely shared by Esther. She feels the loss of the comfort and safety of religion during her sister's illness. Remembering Rhys's refutation of the Bible, she is filled with despair:

Was there no Divine help to be had, then? Her eyes filled with tears ... Now, more than ever in her life, she must be strong, for, though her God had failed her, yet she must never fail Gladys. (p. 157)

On the one hand, Esther is empowered, replacing God in her care for Gladys, but she now lacks a source of strength to which she can turn. No longer subject to God's power, Esther finds that she is ruled by laws both arbitrary and merciless. On discovering that Rhys is the son of her father's enemy, she responds with unsurprised meekness, since a 'bleak acceptance of the strokes of chance was a part of the nature she had inherited from a long line of hillmen' (p. 69). This loss of certainty and control in the society of the time is discussed by Angelique Richardson, who has observed that Darwin's theory of evolution was so disconcerting because it places 'chance at the centre of the universe'.<sup>84</sup> Esther's predicament shows Vaughan's text attempting to explore the anxieties that the new life sciences provoked in the society of the time.

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<sup>84</sup> Richardson, 'The Life Sciences: "Everybody nowadays talks about evolution"', *A Concise Companion to Modernism*, p. 11.

Equally alarming was the fact that the life sciences forced humans to confront their origins. *The Descent of Man* (1871) contains a humbling statement that despite man's 'god-like intellect' he still bears the 'indelible stamp of his lowly origin'.<sup>85</sup> This 'indelible stamp' is prominent in John Bevan who possesses an animalistic physicality in *The Battle to the Weak*. As a fellow drinker in a tavern remarks, he is a 'fine swampin' lad. Look at the shoulders he's got on him, and a neck like a bull, just' (p. 17). John's son takes after his father, and Esther is perturbed by the likeness between her brother and an animal: "[m]ore like a beast nor a man he is," she thought with a spasm of disgust' (p. 269). The link that evolutionary theory makes between man and animal is mirrored in colonial discourse, which equates the Welsh with wild and uncouth animals. The 1847 government-sponsored *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, or 'Blue Books Report' as it is commonly known, was an investigation by three Englishmen, with no understanding of the Welsh language and culture, into religious, moral, educational, social and cultural habits in Wales. In fact, it could be read as a pseudo-anthropological study of the country. Its findings were damning, and the Welsh were condemned as primitive and amoral, a view conveyed in the very language of the Report, which is full of animalistic descriptions of the Welsh, as Gwyneth Tyson Roberts has remarked.<sup>86</sup> Even less obviously inflammatory texts contain a similar view of the bestial Welsh. An Englishman named Mr. Pratt, conducting a tour of Wales in 1798, for example, describes his effect upon the native population:

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<sup>85</sup> Charles Darwin, 'General Summary and Conclusion', *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London: John Murray, 1871), pp. 384-405, in *Nineteenth Century Science: An Anthology*, ed. A. S. Weber (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1999), pp. 233-52 (p. 241).

<sup>86</sup> See Gwyneth Tyson Roberts, *The Language of the Blue Books: The Perfect Instrument of Empire* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1998), p. 184.

at the sight of a man of the world, they will run into a rocky cavity, like a rabbit into its hole, or plunge into the thickest shade of the valley, as if they were escaping from a bird of prey.<sup>87</sup>

While Vaughan's novels occasionally echo the descriptions of the Welsh in colonial discourse, evolutionary theory, of course, suggested that everyone was descended from a common ancestor. In a reversal of the description above, in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* it is Dick, the Englishman, who becomes the hunted animal, which is suggested as he watches an otter-hunting party:

he had seen terror in the hunted eyes and had felt a sharp twinge of kinship. Could the creature be suffering as he had suffered when the wail of a shell sounded above the angry popping of machine guns? (p. 237)

The metaphor of hunter and prey continues as the doctor tells Gwenllian that, due to his ill health, Dick will 'have to be watched as a cat watches a mouse' (p. 256). The game of cat and mouse that Gwenllian plays with Dick culminates in the Englishman's death. The balance of power established in colonial discourse could be turned on its head as the equalising potential of evolutionary science had suggested. As the concepts invoked by Darwinism and colonialism intersect, they have ambivalent implications for the construction of Welsh identity in Vaughan's novels.

Evolutionary theory also placed sex in its scientific context, with little regard for the mannered courtship rituals and rules of propriety demanded by polite society. Gillian Beer has commented that, 'Darwin's theories, with their emphasis on superabundance and extreme fecundity, reached out towards the grotesque'.<sup>88</sup> Human reproduction was seen as part of a natural process that was linked with the fertilisation of plants and the

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<sup>87</sup> Mr. Pratt, *Gleanings through Wales, Holland and West-phalia* (1798), quoted by D. Tecwyn Lloyd, 'The Romantic Parody', *Planet* 31 (March 1976), 29-36 (31).

<sup>88</sup> Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983), p. 123.

crude coupling of animals. This process is suggested in the imagery of Vaughan's novels.

In *The Battle to the Weak*, for instance, Aunt Polly is seen as part of a burgeoning landscape. Her cottage merges into the surrounding countryside 'and from a distance it looked like a button mushroom with snowy top and flesh-coloured stem' (p. 27). It is a place of growth and although Esther had only been there a short time 'already she had begun to blossom like a flower that is transplanted into congenial soil' (p. 27). Aunt Polly herself is the embodiment of superabundance: '[h]er ample person, clothed in a voluminous black silk pelisse, seemed to fill up the whole of the garden, and her smile was as wide as the ocean' (p. 29). Aunt Polly, however, is at odds with the stifling laws of society to which Esther has always adhered. To Esther, Aunt Polly's talk of love, courtship and sex is 'contrary to the vague notions of modesty she had acquired from her Sunday school teacher. But this disconcerting aunt of hers had a gift for making prejudices seem absurd' (p. 30). Aunt Polly's unconventional ways are endorsed by the text, which presents her as a refreshing influence on the oppressed young Esther and her visit with her aunt is a brief period in the novel in which she is happy.

It is during her visit with Aunt Polly that Esther meets Rhys. Their courtship is depicted as part of a biological process that stretches far back into the past. As Esther first encounters her suitor, '[s]trange memories, not of her own, but of her race's past began to stir in her. A thousand starlit lovmakings that had gone to her creation haunted her...' (p. 40). This is taken a step further as Esther's cousin, Megan, is seduced by Tom Pugh, (significantly, this happens in a forest) and she is torn between nature and society:

Her instincts demanded that she should give herself to him freely, unconditionally, as the wild creatures mated; but her reason told her that she must deliberately choose and lawfully marry a man able to hold his own in a hard-

working community and provide a home for her and the children she might bear.  
(p. 171)

Megan, it seems, is a slave to biology as she ‘ceased to struggle or to think, and instinct had its way with her’ (p. 171). The text portrays Megan in a sympathetic light, however, as a review in the *South Wales News* observes: ‘One gets to like the erring Megan, whose trust is betrayed, for she is a child of nature. She is a magnanimous creature, sadly misunderstood by her “religious” relatives.’<sup>89</sup> Evolutionary theory is used by Vaughan to place sex in its biological context. This legitimises and normalises female sexuality and, in doing so, opposes the doctrines of polite society. Even the conservative Gwenllian in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* cannot control her biological programming. When she attempts to seduce the husband she has grown to hate, ‘she despised her body for its half-willing response’ (p. 177). This Welsh woman who yields to the impulses of nature, however, is reminiscent of the representation of the promiscuous Welsh woman, which was a common colonial stereotype, as Jane Aaron has shown.<sup>90</sup> This characterisation of Welsh women is found in the Blue Books Report, in which Commissioner Lingen described Welsh girls as ‘almost universally unchaste’, while the Reverend William Jones of Nefyn claimed that:

Want of chastity is flagrant. The vice is not confined to the poor. In England farmers’ daughters are respectable; in Wales they are in the constant habit of being courted in bed.<sup>91</sup>

Interestingly, *The Black Venus* (1944) by Rhys Davies evaluates the Welsh courting custom and seems to find in its favour, while the statue of a naked black woman stands

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<sup>89</sup> *South Wales News*, February 26<sup>th</sup>, 1925.

<sup>90</sup> See for example, Jane Aaron, ‘Finding a voice in two tongues: gender and colonization’, *Our Sister’s Land: The Changing Identities of Women in Wales*, eds. Jane Aaron, Teresa Rees, Sandra Betts and Moira Vincentelli (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1994), pp. 183-198 and ‘A National Seduction: Wales in Nineteenth-Century Women’s Writing’, *New Welsh Review*, 27 (1994), 31-8.

<sup>91</sup> *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, 1847, iii, 67-8.

conspicuously in the background of the text. This juxtaposition suggests a link between Welsh female sexuality and notions of the primitive. Hilda Vaughan's portrayal of sexuality can be seen to operate in a similar manner. The Blue Books Report was, of course, a text that attempted to justify the anglicisation of the Welsh. With this in mind, Vaughan's depiction of Welsh female sexuality is ambivalent. While *The Battle to the Weak* seems largely to absolve Megan of blame for her 'fall', as it is part of a biological process over which she has no control, in doing so, like the 1847 Report, it inadvertently suggests that the unchaste Welsh women who cannot regulate their own behaviour require the control of an outside agent, be it men, the state, or as the Blue Books argued, a greater colonial power. Richardson has described natural selection as a 'rebel force' which is not subject to society's rules.<sup>92</sup> This is reminiscent of the animalistic and sexually unrestrained Welsh who disregard the English social mores and require intervention to control them.

## II

As the ambivalent implications that evolutionary theory has for Welsh identity in Vaughan's novels begin to suggest, the life sciences had the paradoxical ability to destroy or reinforce hierarchies. Although the life sciences could pose a dangerous threat to the established order, they could also be manipulated to the advantage of existing hierarchical structures. For example, evolutionary theory had been revolutionary in its equalising premise that all organisms were formed from a common ancestor. What it also allowed for, however, was the existence of degrees of evolution and the idea that some species and, more importantly, some races were more highly evolved than others. In 1914, R. A. Fisher, a scientist who would find renown in the 1920s and 1930s for his

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<sup>92</sup> Richardson, *A Concise Companion to Modernism*, p. 9.



breakthrough in population genetics, building on much earlier theories espoused by Darwin and Boaz, posited that there was a direct correlation between the evolution of man and his native environment:

the two are connected by double ties: the first that the surest and probably the quickest way to improve environment is to secure a sound stock; and secondly that, for the eugenicist, the best environment is that which effects the most rapid racial improvement.<sup>93</sup>

An earlier version of this theory can be seen in the opening lines of *The Rebecca Rioter* (1880) by Amy Dillwyn, as the narrator asks,

Do not people's natures, more or less, take after the places where they are born and pass their lives? And is not a man much more likely to be rough and wild if he has been brought up in an isolated cottage whose walls rock and shake with every blast of wind, than he would have been if he had lived in some snug valley home...<sup>94</sup>

Just as the inhabitants of Upper Killay in Dillwyn's novel are 'rough and wild' because their environment is, so in *The Battle to the Weak* and *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*, Wales does not appear to be the ideal landscape to encourage evolutionary progress. *The Battle to the Weak* opens with a curious echo of a creation story, in which Wales is depicted as a primeval landscape reminiscent of 'the first days of creation' (p. 7). It is a landscape that has yet to form:

For 'there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.' Later in the day it would be possible, from this point, to look westward into the bleak country of Wales and eastward over the richer pasturage of Herefordshire. Now the world was without form and void; the valley beneath and the hills beyond were alike hidden. (p. 7)

This notion of Wales as a country trapped in the early stages of time is a recurring image in the novel. As Rhys reaches Esther's home, Pengarreg, the narrative informs us that , '[t]he muck in the fold was so deep that it made him think of the earth in its earliest

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<sup>93</sup> R. A. Fisher, 'Some Hopes of a Eugenicist', *Eugenics Review*, 5 (1914), 309-315 (310).

<sup>94</sup> Amy Dillwyn, *The Rebecca Rioter: A Story of Killay Life* (1880; Dinas Powys: Honno, 2004), p. 1.

stages, when Megatherium and Diplodocus ploughed through the warm slime' (p. 90).

Wales as a country emerging from the swamp is echoed in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*; as Dick first encounters Wales we are told that, '[n]ever had he seen any land so wet and soft' (pp. 12-13). To the English soldier, the landscape is also encountered with 'a delicious sensation of a challenge, as though it had been a topee' (p. 13). This strange reference to a 'topee', a Hindi pith helmet, worn by the English in tropical countries in the mid-nineteenth century, is ideologically suggestive. Wales is constructed as a primitive landscape in Vaughan's texts that has yet to fully emerge from the mists of time. Dick also views it as a colonial project for the civilizing influence of the English, though his perception is ironic since his appropriation of the Welsh land is both tenuous and extremely short-lived.

Though Vaughan's plots may resist the colonial view of English supremacy, this is not always the case in her use of language. As the inhabitants of a primitive landscape, it is not surprising to learn that the people of Wales are savage and barbarous. From the 'mist' (p. 71) that engulfs the landscape in *The Battle to the Weak* emerges 'an aged porter, bent with rheumatism, and looking as if he had been weary and wet since the beginning of time' who then 'hobbled away' (p. 71). The Welsh characters of both *The Battle to the Weak* and *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* are often associated with imagery of the primitive. The Lloyds in *The Battle to the Weak* are referred to as a 'tribe' (p. 100, 103) and as Rhys observes his family, gathered together for a funeral, '[i]t flashed through his mind that they resembled the monoliths of Stonehenge, of which he had seen a picture' (p. 98). Vaughan's Welsh characters are often linked with imagery that recalls their pagan roots. Megan is seduced within a 'temple of trees, which was

carpeted with dry, dead pine needles, and no birds sang or nested there' (p. 169). It is a place of death and as she gives herself to Tom Pugh, yielding to nature, Megan becomes a sacrificial victim upon a pagan altar. A similar motif appears in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*. Gwenllian hatches her wicked plans within a circle of yew trees described as 'survivals, like very ancient witches, of a time of faith and fear, when the land was still haunted by ghosts and demons' (p. 48). Gwenllian is, indeed, surrounded by allusions to witchcraft. She tells Dick that she 'can see in the dark like a "witch's fowl"' (p. 261). Gwenllian has been taught how to cast spells as a child by Martha 'the wise 'oman,' (p. 202) who is reputed to be a distant relation. Using the knowledge passed on from the old witch, she fashions a voodoo-style doll of her husband in a desperate bid to bring about his death (p. 203). This links Gwenllian to old Welsh traditions but is simultaneously suggestive of African and Creole culture, invoking colonial notions of the exotic primitive.

Darwin's theories made it clear what would happen to less evolutionary 'fit' peoples like the primitive and barbarous Welsh of Vaughan's descriptions. In *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin saw colonisation of neighbouring countries as an inevitable part of evolution:

when one of the two adjoining tribes becomes more numerous and powerful than the other, the contest is soon settled by war, slaughter, cannibalism, slavery and absorption. Even when a weaker tribe is not thus abruptly swept away, if it once begins to decrease, it generally goes on decreasing until it is extinct.<sup>95</sup>

Evolutionary theory could potentially be used to legitimise imperialism, normalising it as part of a natural process. Significantly, this completely transforms Darwin's theories from a science that validated aspects that threatened the dominant social order, to a

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<sup>95</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man* (1871) reproduced in *The Idea of Race*, eds. Robert Bernasconi and Tommy L. Lott (Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing, 2000), pp. 54-78, (p. 70).

science that offered the legitimisation of a means of controlling and overcoming that threat. The struggle between ‘tribes’ is portrayed in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* as Gwenllïan describes the ongoing contest between her family and others:

We have been here since the legendary days of Welsh history. English people with French names who are proud of having ‘come over with the Conqueror’ can’t show a pedigree that compares with ours. We fought the Romans, the Saxons after them, and held on to our own. We can’t go down now... (p. 69)

More than just the continuation of a family line, Gwenllïan’s battle is part of a history of Welsh colonial struggle that it is suggested is ongoing. Part of this continuing struggle is reflected in Matthew Arnold’s call, in the late nineteenth century, for the Welsh to be more fully colonised by the English in language that echoes that of Darwin above:

The fusion of the inhabitants of these islands into one homogenous, English speaking whole, the breaking down of barriers between us, the swallowing up of separate provincial nationalities, is a consummation to which the natural course of things irresistibly tends.<sup>96</sup>

Arnold employs a loose grasp of the life sciences to justify this proposition. Drawing on the ‘*science des origines*’<sup>97</sup> and ‘the striking ideas of the ethnologists about the true groupings of the human race,’<sup>98</sup> he asserts that ‘science – true science, - recognises in the bottom of her soul a law of ultimate fusion, of conciliation.’<sup>99</sup> Arnold’s proposed method of achieving this was to flatter and cajole the Welsh, seducing them into a united British identity that was richer for sharing in the best traits of its composite nations. For example, Arnold enthused that the Welsh Eisteddfod tradition ‘shows something Greek in them, something spiritual, something humane, something (I am afraid one must add) which in

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<sup>96</sup> Matthew Arnold, *The Study of Celtic Literature* (1866; London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1905), p. 10. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, p. 13.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, pp. 16-17

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

the English common people is not to be found.’<sup>100</sup> Arnold’s celebration of the Welsh, however, also depicts them as a passionate and unpredictable, rather childlike, nation in need of the parental influence of the English. The Welshman is characterised as a figure who is ‘sensuous; loves bright colours, company and pleasure,’<sup>101</sup> while the Saxon is marked by his ‘steadiness’ and ‘honesty.’<sup>102</sup> This essentialism is echoed in Gwenllian’s description of her race to Dick in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*. She tells him that, ‘[b]etter than gold, we love music and song, poetry and rhetoric, the history and traditions of our race, and, above all, our land’ (p. 113). Arnold’s condescending idea that the Welsh require an authoritative control that curbs their passionate ways is reminiscent of the technique used by Gwenllian to cajole the local people into co-operation. As she informs Dick, ‘[y]ou need firm but very light hands with these spirited Welsh cobs’ (p. 94). Her comments appear in a novel which could be read as displaying the dangers of extremist Welsh nationalism, as we will see in greater depth later in the chapter. The text shows how a Welsh attachment to their land results in the murder of an Englishman. Hilda Vaughan seems to advocate a milder Welsh identity that accepts its role within Britain, not wholly unlike that endorsed by Arnold.<sup>103</sup>

Moreover, the descriptions of the Welsh in Vaughan’s novels frequently borrow from the language of anthropology. This relatively new science could, in some cases, be used to confirm colonial assumptions, since it allowed the more sophisticated races to view the supposedly barbarous races as scientific subjects. Cranial measurements, the study of customs, language and culture all distanced the scientist from the subject and

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p. 88.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 81.

<sup>103</sup> Vaughan’s endorsement of a Welsh identity that is unique but also recognises its greater duty to Britain and Britishness is explored in chapter three of this thesis.

allowed the threat of the native to be controlled and contained as scientific data and statistics. John Beddoe conducted such a study of the Welsh in his book *The Races of Britain* (1885). His work contains numerous tables and charts listing the head measurements, eye, skin and hair colour and ‘nigrescence’ of different sections of the British population. Statistics from different regions in Britain are compared, but are also measured against the rather vague category labelled ‘Educated Englishmen’.<sup>104</sup> Wales has a high score on the index of nigrescence, with Beddoe commenting that the ‘cold, rainy, and mountainous interior’ of Wales is home to ‘a prevalence of dark eyes beyond what I have met with in any other part of Britain’.<sup>105</sup> This comparison between the Welsh and black people, and the implicit assumption that the latter represented a low level of cultural sophistication, is reminiscent of a comment made in the Blue Books Report about a boy in rural Breconshire, which claimed that there was ‘scarcely any difference between him and a rude or rustic Hottentot.’<sup>106</sup> According to Beddoe, as a ‘dark haired and often dark-eyed people’, the Welsh fall into two racial categories: those identified by ‘broad cheekbones and a short compact build, and by the dark complexion prevalent among the Welsh’ and the taller ‘long-headed dark races of the Mediterranean stock’.<sup>107</sup> Similar anthropological descriptions of the Welsh can be found in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*. Dick is alarmed as he meets the Welsh natives of his new home. He views his Welsh guide with distrust, unable to ‘tell what thought was moving behind those dark,

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<sup>104</sup> John Beddoe, *The Races of Britain: A Contribution to the Anthropology of Western Europe* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), p. 255. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>105</sup> Beddoe, *The Races of Britain*, pp. 163, 286-7.

<sup>106</sup> *Reports of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, 1847, ii, 135-6.

<sup>107</sup> Beddoe, *The Races of Britain*, pp. 288, 26.

keen eyes' (p. 12). Nor is his first impression of Gwen and her sister favourable. They are described as

tall and dark... But they weren't his style - too foreign, too much what you expected of the Welsh... those almost Italian features with so little flesh upon them, suggested bad temper, or worse, fanaticism. He shouldn't wonder if they were rabid teetotallers, or religious, or something of the kind. (pp. 25-6)

The peasants fare even worse as they are condemned by Dick, who is disgusted by their appearance: '[w]hat a grotesque looking lot they were - some of the older ones bearded, some whiskered, some more like dagos than Englishmen' (p. 110). The view of the Welsh as racially inferior is implicit in Dick's use of language which was validated by its basis in what was considered scientific fact.

Dick's view of the Welsh, however, is that of an English incomer. Nor is he an entirely sympathetic character, so his perspective cannot be taken as representative of Vaughan's text. Dick's comments are not the only example of such views, however, as Vaughan's writing does rely on anthropologically-recognised physical features of the Welsh in much of her work. Her short story, 'Alive or Dead', for example, which appeared in a 1944 edition of *Story* magazine, is built around the premise of the two Welsh 'races', one dark, the other red-headed, that she refers to in her letter to Sutcliff cited at the beginning of this chapter. The very first line reads, '[b]efore the tall red folk were ever seen in Wales, did all the land belong to a race black-eyed, short of stature, with hearts of smouldering fire?'<sup>108</sup> The plot centres on the struggle between two girls for the love of a young Welsh man, Danny. Kate, who is dark-haired, has loved Danny since she was a child and has grown up with him. He falls in love with newcomer, Annie, however, who is red-haired. The story parallels Annie's usurpation of Kate in Danny's

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<sup>108</sup> Hilda Vaughan, 'Alive or Dead', *Story* (May / June 1944), vol xxiv, no. 107, 72-85 (75). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

affections with the appropriation of the red-headed Celts of the land which had previously belonged to the dark-haired indigenous race. Kate kills her adversary on the day of her wedding and stands in triumph over Annie's lifeless body: '[w]ith hair red as fairy gold the stranger lay, whose race in ages past had dispossessed Kate's forefathers of their land' (p. 82). The competition between Welsh races depicted here is a more overt revisiting of a theme found elsewhere in Vaughan's novels. The long-term feud between John Bevan and Elias Lloyd in *The Battle to the Weak* after a drunken dispute is a more subtle allusion to the tensions between the 'races' of Wales. The two Welshmen could not be more opposed. While Bevan goes to church and drinks copiously, Lloyd attends chapel and is teetotal. Bevan is red-haired while the description of Lloyd recalls Beddoe's anthropological description of the dark Welsh. Lloyd, we are told, is 'a type still to be found among the Celtic peoples of Wales. His skull was long and narrow, and his black eyes slightly oblique. He was short and thin, and his yellowish complexion suggested kinship with the Portuguese' (p. 11). The racial competition between Kate and Annie and John Bevan and Elias Lloyd is an internal Welsh struggle, which is detached from the external influence of English colonisation. The references to anthropology here position Wales as the central focus of attention, with little reference to the English who inhabit the periphery of the conflict.

### III

Rather than just a colonial viewpoint, then, Vaughan's 'racial' descriptions of her characters can also be seen in the context of anthropological studies of the Welsh from a Welsh perspective, which were carried out at the beginning of the twentieth century. The most notable of these was conducted by H. J. Fleure, who was appointed to the Gregynog



Chair of Geography and Anthropology at Aberystwyth University in 1917. Between 1905 and 1916 he conducted extensive anthropological research into the physical characteristics and native culture of the Welsh. Like Beddoe before him, Fleure measured the head shape and skin pigmentation of the Welsh, along with other characteristics, and found many of the Welsh to be a swarthy, long-headed people with deep-set eyes.<sup>109</sup> In Pumlumon he had even identified ‘more than seven adult cases of unusually complete survival of physical characteristics we generally associate with the earliest type of modern man.’<sup>110</sup> Even though he could see the Neanderthal in the Welshman, his perception of the Welsh was far more positive than that of Beddoe. Pyrs Gruffudd has noted that ‘Fleure was convinced that the [Welsh] peasantry cherished universal and abiding values, and that peasant life retained a vital diversity’.<sup>111</sup> The anthropological studies of Fleure, R. G. Stapledon, Cyril Fox and Iorwerth C. Peate, led them to view rural Wales as a place of virtue and racial purity with an unsullied culture embodied in its inhabitants, the *gwerin* (folk), that was in contrast to the degeneracy, both moral and physical, of the modern city-dwellers. Their claims were embraced by the newly-founded Plaid Cymru in 1925 which, as Gruffudd has shown, used their ideas to endorse its ‘Back to the Land’ proposals, intended to revitalise the Welsh countryside.<sup>112</sup> This finds resonance in the cultural project led by O. M. Edwards in his periodicals *Cymru* (which he founded in 1891) and *Cymru’r Plant* (which he founded in 1892), whose motto was ‘I godi’r hen wlad yn ei hôl’ (which loosely translates as ‘to raise the old land to its former

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<sup>109</sup> H. J. Fleure, *Wales and her People* (Wrexham: Hughes and Son, 1926), p. 7. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>110</sup> H. J. Fleure, ‘The People of Cardiganshire’, *Cardiganshire Antiquarian Society Transactions* 4 (1926) 15-21 (15).

<sup>111</sup> Pyrs Gruffudd, ‘Back to the Land: historiography, rurality and the nation in inter-war Wales’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geography* 19 (1994), 61-77 (67). All further references are to this edition.

<sup>112</sup> Gruffudd, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geography*, p. 70.

glory'). In his nation-building periodicals aimed at the *gwerin*, Edwards employed the language of race and degeneracy to spur on the Welsh:

Clywson son gan y rhai gynt mai trwy golli neillduoloion ei genedl, trwy ymgolli ymysg dynol ryw gyffredin, y perffeithir y Cymro. Nid dyna'm profiad i... Na, trwy fod yn genedl etholedig, - mewn cyfamod ysgrifennwyd, nid ar bapur, ond ar galonnau, - y medrwn wneyd ein rhan i ddyrchafu dynol ryw... Tra deil y Cymry'n genedl bydd eu bywyd fel pren ar lan afonydd dyfroedd, a'i ffrwyth yn ei bryd a'i ddalen heb wywo, yn faeth ac yn gysur ysbrydol i'r byd; gwywa os dryllir ef, a gwelir ei ddail melynion crin yn ymwasgaru'n gawod ddifendith ddiwerth dros wledydd y ddaear. Tra'n sugno nerth o'i undeb â'i genedl y bydd bywyd pob Cymro'n dlws fel deilen werdd ac yn werthfawr fel ffrwyth yn ei bryd.<sup>113</sup>

[We heard tell from those before us that by losing the characteristics of our race, by losing ourselves amongst common humanity, that the Welshman will be perfected. That is not my experience. No, by being an elect nation, - in a covenant written, not on paper, but on hearts, - we can play our part to raise human kind... While the Welsh remain a nation their life will be like trees on the banks of a river, bear fruit in season and bringing forth leaves, a source of nourishment and a spiritual comfort for the world; it will wilt if destroyed, and we will see its withered yellow leaves scattered as a graceless, useless shower over the countries of the earth. While deriving strength from its union with its nation the life of every Welshman will be beautiful like a green leaf and precious as a fruit in season.]

The argument made by Edwards here seems to answer and refute the case made by Arnold that we saw earlier in the chapter. He suggests that instead of being absorbed into a larger identity, the Welsh should cherish their difference in order to 'perfect' their nation and 'race'. The life sciences were thus embraced by the different spheres of science, politics and culture in Wales which were, in effect, working together to promote, and, importantly, to safeguard the positive aspects of Wales, its culture and people.

One of the primary ideas that emerged from the anthropological theories espoused by Fleure, Stapledon, Fox and Peate was a clear divide between the unchanged, rural

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<sup>113</sup> O. M. Edwards, introduction to *Cymru* vol. III, no. 12 (July 15<sup>th</sup>, 1892).

areas which were ‘a refuge for old ways and old types’<sup>114</sup> and the industrialised areas which had been harmfully modernised. According to Gruffudd, Stapledon believed that the ‘vitalism and stress on the non-material needs of peoples had...been eradicated by urban existence but lived on in the rural population [of Wales]’<sup>115</sup> This finds parallels in a case made by O. M. Edwards in the same year:

Apeliaf at Gymry gweithgar ein trefydd mawrion, a gofynnaf, - ‘Onid Cymreigddod eich heneidiau sydd yn rhoddi nerth i chwi?’ A hoffwn ofyn hefyd – ‘A fedr eich plant Seisnigedig deimlo’r un dylanwadau ag y deimlasoch chwi; ac a fedrant wneyd cymaint?’<sup>116</sup>

[I appeal to the hardworking Welsh of our large towns, and I ask, - ‘Is it not the Welshness of your souls that gives you strength?’ And I would also like to ask – ‘Can your Anglicised children feel the same influences as you have felt; and are they capable of doing as much?’]

The celebration of Wales as a repository for ‘old ways and types’ is reproduced in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* as Gwenllian informs Dick that the estate’s servants and tenants, the inhabitants of rural Ceredigion, ‘haven’t left the eighteenth century. I hope they never will’ (p. 112). Meanwhile, Stapledon’s view of town and country is echoed in *The Battle to the Weak*. The town is a place of lethargy in contrast with the honest toil of the countryside; while riding through a sleeping town, the farmer, John Bevan, says that he, ‘never did see such a late-risin’ lazy lot’ (p. 13). Town-life is also associated with immorality.<sup>117</sup> It is during his visits to the town that Bevan drinks excessively before returning to the countryside to beat and terrorise his family. It is also a place to which the sinful are banished. Tom Pugh flees the countryside for ‘the works’ of industrial Glamorgan after his seduction of Megan. It is to this industrialised area that Megan must

<sup>114</sup> Fleure, ‘Problems of Welsh Archaeology’, *Archaeologia Cambrensis* 3, 225-42 (233).

<sup>115</sup> Gruffudd, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geography*, p. 65.

<sup>116</sup> O. M. Edwards, introduction to *Cymru* vol. III, no. 12.

<sup>117</sup> This will be explored further in chapter five of this thesis.

also go when she is shamed by the birth of her illegitimate child. Industrial Wales is also associated with illness and frailty, mirroring anthropological views of the poor genetic stock which Stapledon claimed could be found there.<sup>118</sup> Mr Price, the postman, is described as sickly, with rotting teeth, and unlike the strapping country-folk, '[h]e was flat chested, more like a collier than a countryman' (p. 79). Vaughan's portrayal of industrial Wales is reminiscent of that found in other Welsh women's novels, such as *A Welsh Witch* (1902) by 'Allen Raine' in which 'the works' is a hellish place, both morally corrupt and unhealthy, a 'dreadful pit from which smoke belched forth in a column of blackness.'<sup>119</sup> Though Vaughan portrays the countryside as preferable to the town she does not idealise it completely, however, as we can see in *The Battle to the Weak*. Rhys establishes a village library, which brings new ideas into the community. He does not share Fleure's enthusiasm for the 'old ways and old types.' Rhys believes that Wales is a place of stagnation that should embrace change; rather than a rural idyll he sees it as a 'melancholy, wet, depressing place full of drunkenness, insanity, suicide' (p. 224). As he informs Esther,

the church - and chapel-going people of Wales are all obsessed, as you yourself have been, with their family ties - that and nothing else. They recognise no larger duty. They carry on their petty feuds from generation to generation, and justify them in the name of loyalty. (p. 226)

Vaughan's depiction of the petty and vindictive battle between the Bevans and Lloyds seems to reinforce his view to some extent. The culture of the *gwerin* here can be

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<sup>118</sup> According to Stapledon the 'country stock' of Wales were more inbred and pure and thus preferable to the more varied townspeople as '[e]very breeder knows that a foundation of pure stocks constitutes an essential reservoir upon which to draw in the improvement and development of a race.' R. G. Stapledon, *The Land Now and Tomorrow* (1935; London: Faber and Faber, 1944), p. 231.

<sup>119</sup> Allen Raine, *A Welsh Witch: A Romance of Rough Places* (London: Hutchinson, 1902), p. 309. In fact, Raine is even closer than Vaughan to Stapledon's theories and O. M. Edwards' concern, as industrialised Glamorganshire is portrayed negatively as a place where new English notions are introduced to the Welsh. In *A Welsh Witch* it is feared that on Yshbel's return from 'the works' 'she'll be bringing English notions with her' (p. 236).

restrictive in its adherence to the past. While Vaughan echoes the view of the countryside as a healthy, vital and morally uplifting place, its virtues are mixed with vices in a portrayal that is more measured than that of the Welsh anthropologists and the early thinkers of Plaid Cymru.

In the same way that anthropology could be used to construct both anti-Welsh and pro-Welsh ideologies, Vaughan's texts display the use of eugenics, which was commonly seen as an imperialist tool, for Welsh ends. The creation of a superior race by the intermarriage of genetically favourable parents and the prevention of breeding among less eugenically favourable parents was a highly popular concept among the British intelligentsia in the early twentieth century and the Eugenics Society attracted a high proportion of female members. The use of eugenics for colonial purposes is explained by Francis Galton in a 1904 lecture:

Let us for a moment suppose that the practice of eugenics should hereafter raise the average quality of our nation to that of its better moiety at the present day and consider the gain ... We should be better fitted to fulfil our vast imperial opportunities.<sup>120</sup>

A super-race, it was believed, could possess the ultimate colonial power, enabling it to conquer all inferior nations. In *Her Father's House* and *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*, however, it is Welsh women who act according to eugenic principles. Nell Tretower, the heroine of *Her Father's House*, falls pregnant while living unhappily in London. Despite being heavily pregnant, she walks all the way from London to her ancestral home in Wales, undertaking 'this journey to her own country that her son might

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<sup>120</sup> Francis Galton, 'Eugenics: Its Definition, Scope and Aims', (1904), reproduced in *The Idea of Race*, eds. Robert Bernasconi and Tommy L. Lott (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 2000), pp. 79-83 (p. 80).

be born there.’<sup>121</sup> Her pregnancy is part of a larger genetic progress, as she reflects, ‘[s]ome day, men like gods shall walk the earth. And may be this boy of mine shall be their father’s father’ (p. 323). For her, as for Rhys in *The Battle to the Weak*, religion is replaced by science, since ‘in this renewal of the race, obliterating the individual, perpetuating the type, lay the only immortality of which Nell could be sure’ (p. 345). Gwenllian is similarly preoccupied with the survival of her people. Her duty, as she perceives it, is to give birth to an heir to continue her family and its traditions. Having produced a son, and thus succeeding in her mission of positive eugenics Gwenllian is convinced that:

[w]hat she had suffered in her body to bring him to life, had been more than repaid in the pride and pleasure she had in this exquisite small creature of her own substance, this promise of a material immortality, this gift of hers to the race she worshipped. (p. 159)

Gwenllian also commits an act of negative eugenics. When Dick proves to be ‘a drag on the estate, a burden, an encumbrance’ (p. 193), Gwenllian decides to kill him for the benefit of her race:

How did one kill a man? Men had as many lives as cats. How much easier to kill herself! She would not fear to take her own life, though that, too, was a sin. But her life was of value. His was not. She must live for the sake of Plas Einon and its heirs. (p. 263)

Gwenllian asserts the ultimate control over the future of her people. In Vaughan’s texts, the colonial instrument of eugenics has fallen into the hands of the colonised.

Nell and Gwenllian’s eugenic practices enable the preservation of a specifically Welsh way of life. Such an action constitutes what Homi Bhabha has termed ‘mimicry’ of the coloniser, which ‘results in the *splitting* of colonial discourse,’ rendering its

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<sup>121</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *Her Father’s House* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1930), p. 323. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

authority ambivalent and open to subversion.<sup>122</sup> Gwenllian has a clear vision of her role; in marrying Dick, securing the estate and bringing forth an heir, she will be ‘the woman to whom the next generation would appeal as the oracle of their race’, so that ‘the tradition might be handed on’ (p. 46). This is highly reminiscent of the nationalist role allocated to the female from the late nineteenth and well into the twentieth centuries. The importance of the role of the mother in England is evident in Marie Stopes’ *Mother England: A Contemporary History* (1929). In this text Stopes calls upon ‘Mother England’ to reproduce in a wise and informed manner in order ‘to bear in health and joy the beautiful and happy scions of an Imperial Race that might even yet flower from our ancient stock.’<sup>123</sup> Welsh Nationalism was simultaneously seeking the ideal moral and upright woman as a nation-building mother. The Welsh mother, it was hoped, would also be a guardian of the Welsh language and culture, passing it on to a new generation. This idea was presented in many Welsh periodicals for women such as *Y Gymraes* and *Y Frythones* as well as in *Cymru’r Plant* in which O. M. Edwards promoted the importance of parents reading with their child in Welsh, ‘yn enwedig y fam’ (especially the mother).<sup>124</sup> It is also expressed by Mallt Williams in the preface to her novel, *A Maid of Cymru* (1901):

Especially would we address our plea to our country-women, for with them lies the power of restoring the language of Arthur to the nursery, the school room and the dining-room.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 91.

<sup>123</sup> Marie Stopes, *Mother England: A Contemporary History* (1929), reproduced in *Marie Stopes: Birth Control and Other Writings* vol I, ed. Lesley A. Hall (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 2000), p. 191.

<sup>124</sup> O. M. Edwards, introduction to *Cymru’r Plant* vol xvi (1907).

<sup>125</sup> Mallt Williams, *A Maid of Cymru: A Patriotic Romance* (1901), reproduced in Marion Löffler, ‘A Romantic Nationalist’, *Planet*, 121 (1997), 58-66 (60).

Both *Her Father's House* and *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* show Vaughan exploring the role of the mother within the nation. It is an ambivalent role for women. Nell's experience of giving birth empowers her: '[w]as she not almost the equal of God, for on her also was laid the terrible and holy burden of creation?' (p. 245). It also robs her of individuality, however, as she reflects, '[h]ow petty and of what brief duration, were the emotions of one woman in the history of the race!' (p. 345) On the whole, however, Nell's nation-building reproductive endeavours are endorsed by the text. The birth of her son is seen to be part of a larger regeneration of the Welsh land itself. Nell tells her husband, Evan, of her intention to restore the family estate as part of her son's inheritance, 'to keep this place and make it again as it was, and pass it on to our son when the time do come... There'll not be a tree come down as I can save by my labours' (p. 344). Her statement seems to echo the motto of O. M. Edwards to restore the old nation to her former glory that we saw earlier.

This is certainly not the case in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*. This novel directly followed *Her Father's House* and signals a shift in ideology, possibly in line with the gradual general disillusionment with eugenics in Britain during the 1930s. Gwenllian's eugenic practices have tipped the balance and harmony of nature and she becomes a monstrous mutation of ideal motherhood. Her children are objects of pity. Her sister, Frances, watches Gwenllian with her favourite son, Illtyd, and is 'sorry for a child whose mother loved him so little for his own sake' (pp. 276-7). Gwenllian's eugenic principles leave little room for love. We are told that 'for her the estate had come first and ... her children had been called into existence only as heirs to the estate' (p. 197). Gwenllian's pathological attachment to her 'race' and her land serve as a warning against



the dangers of extreme nationalism. It is significant that Gwenllian's eugenic nation-building practices, which are not endorsed by the text, unlike Nell's, harm the English and therefore pose a risk to harmonious 'Britishness'. The text's condemnation is suggested since the wrongs that Gwenllian has committed for the sake of the family and the estate have infected the land with negative connotations. After she has learnt of her sister's misdeeds, Frances flees in horror from her ancestral home, 'beautiful, devouring Plas Einon' (p. 286) and, significantly, goes to England, never to return. The concluding scene of the novel sees Frances standing beside an ancient burial mound. A local asks her what the mound used to be and '[w]ith her eyes upon Plas Einon, she answered that it had been a place of burial' (p. 287). Gwenllian's eugenic practices, it is implied, have had a negative effect upon the Welsh land itself. Vaughan's text begins to question the suitability of this colonial model of eugenics for Wales and the Welsh. This can also be seen in Bertha Thomas's short story 'The Only Girl' (1913). In this tale the narrator and her friend, both from London, visit a Welsh farmhouse in which the daughter of the house, Catrin Issachar Jones, is 'what you call feeble-minded; slightly deficient intellectually. She suffers from asthma and epileptic fits besides.'<sup>126</sup> The narrator's friend, Edith, who, we are told, 'is a Eugenist' considers Catrin '[b]etter dead', since, 'we are coming to an age of light and leading when such hapless creatures will not be born – or not permitted to exist.'<sup>127</sup> The narrator points out the different perceptions of people such as Catrin in London and Wales. She remarks that,

if Catrin were London-born, she would, no doubt, if rich, be with a trained nurse or medical guardian somewhere out of sight; or, if poor, in an Institution for those

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<sup>126</sup> Bertha Thomas, 'The Only Girl' in *Stranger Within the Gates*, ed. Kirsti Bohata (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2008), p. 25. All further references are to this edition. ['The Only Girl' first appeared in Bertha Thomas, *Picture Tales of the Welsh Hills* in 1913].

<sup>127</sup> Thomas, *Stranger Within the Gates*, p. 25.

similarly afflicted. But the Issachar Joneses have their own point of view. The defenceless and least fortunate member is the last they would wish to banish from the family circle.<sup>128</sup>

The sensitive depiction of Catrin throughout the story implies that the Welsh approach to Catrin's condition is far more humane.

In fact, *The Battle to the Weak* portrays Social Darwinism as unsuitable for Wales, unless it is significantly adapted. While Gwenllian's attempt to use eugenic principles to further her own Welsh race is portrayed as horrifying, the narrator of *The Battle to the Weak* also claims that evolutionary theory is, in fact, completely incompatible with Welsh nationalist ideals. When Rhys explains to Esther how man has evolved from the ape, the narrator interjects that in doing so, '[h]e had forgotten his lightly-held belief in the past Golden Age of Wales' (p. 64). To yearn for a return to an idealised Welsh past would be to refute the evolutionary notion that civilization progressed to a more useful and ideal state. A more mature Rhys, later in the novel, infers that evolution transcends the nation as we have all evolved from a common source. He tells Esther, 'I am always thinking of mankind in the mass - this great quarrelsome family of which I am a member' (p. 264). Most importantly, as we also saw in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* and in Bertha Thomas's short story, there is no place for the new life sciences in Wales because of their amorality. Genetic scientists and Social Darwinists such as J. B. S. Haldane and Francis Galton famously argued that there was no room for morality in evolutionary science.<sup>129</sup> Vaughan's texts, however, seek to reconcile morality with the life sciences. In *The Battle to the Weak* it is a very different form of evolution

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid, p. 25.

<sup>129</sup> See J. B. S. Haldane, 'Daedalus, or, Science and the Future', *J. B. S. Haldane* <http://www.marxists.org/archive/haldane/works/1920s/daedalus.htm> (accessed on: 06/01/2006) and Galton, *The Idea of Race*, p. 79.

that the text suggests is appropriate for Wales. Rhys calls for a more moderate evolutionary process, one that will 'maintain competition between races and individuals whilst eliminating its present cruelty' (p. 264). This alternative evolution is not so callous and violent; it leads to a greater race but also a more moral one. Rhys describes the transition from ape to civilized man as a moral process, 'gettin' a bit kinder to each other, a bit less fierce and cruel like, and more able to think before we do act, instead o' actin' on instinct no matter how we are goin' to harm others by doin' so' (p. 64).<sup>130</sup> Rhys's ideology is supported by the text, whose title, *The Battle to the Weak*, promotes an almost polar opposite creed from the evolutionary notion of the 'survival of the fittest'. In fact, the title alludes to the biblical quotation from Ecclesiastes, which appears as the epigraph to the novel: 'The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong' (p. 3). This would seem to constitute an attempt to reconcile religion with evolution. It is reminiscent of O. M. Edwards's approach in *Cymru* and *Cymru'r Plant*, in which the language of the life sciences is mingled with a strong religious message.<sup>131</sup> The more moral life sciences advocated for Wales in *The Battle to the Weak* would also remove the colonial element. This is voiced as Esther reminds Rhys of his ideas about evolution and civilisation:

Isn't it because you can't bear as small little nations should be oppressed that you are wantin' the Great Powers to protect the weak? You are not holding that might is right, but as strength did ought to be showin' mercy. (p. 287)

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<sup>130</sup> His idea is not unlike George Eliot's concept of meliorism; a belief that human intervention could very gradually change society for the better: in *Middlemarch*, for example, women such as Dorothea Brooke are viewed as contributing to 'the growing good of the world' [George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, ed. Bert G. Hornback (1871-2; New York: Norton, 2000), p. 515.] Rhys seems to combine meliorism and evolutionary theory.

<sup>131</sup> For example in an introduction to *Cymru'r Plant* Edwards compares botany with religion: 'ceisir denu'r plant i garu gwaith bysedd Duw. Rhoddir aml gipdrem iddynt ar fywyd dyddorol adar a blodau a physgod. [An attempt will be made to encourage children to love the work of God's fingers. Frequent glimpses will be given into the interesting lives of birds and flowers and fish.] O. M. Edwards, introduction to *Cymru'r Plant* iii (1899).

It is suggested that the stronger specimens of evolution have a duty to protect rather than to colonise those weaker than themselves. What Vaughan's texts demand is a moral evolution towards a state in which great nations do not conquer smaller countries and in which Wales could retain its language, culture and identity while living in harmony with its imperial neighbour.

Hilda Vaughan's depiction of the life sciences places her texts squarely within a vibrant, topical debate in contemporary thinking and resonates with the work of many other authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In *The Battle to the Weak* in particular, Vaughan is engaging with global concepts from a Welsh-centred point of view. This first novel is characterised by its pertinent social awareness (which will be explored in relation to women in chapter four of this thesis) which gradually, but significantly, diminishes in her later work. In *The Battle to the Weak*, *Her Father's House* and *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*, Vaughan explores what Darwin's theories, Social Darwinism, and Anthropology meant for Wales and the Welsh, for Britishness and, specifically, for women. Evolutionary theory was an exciting, unsettling and also potentially dangerous idea that brought with it new uncertainties and anxieties. It was also open to interpretation and could be used either to destroy or reinforce hierarchies, colonial ones among them, to legitimise the established order or to promote a counter-ideology, such as Welsh nationalism. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the three texts differ considerably in the conclusions that they draw. *Her Father's House* points out that eugenic principles of reproduction are detrimental to individual identity, particularly for women. The text seems, however, to suggest that this is necessary for the greater good of the race, a specifically Welsh race, in this case. This preservation of Welsh identity is

mirrored, to an extent, in *The Battle to the Weak*, which advocates a form of evolutionary progress that safeguards small nations, such as Wales, and embodies an anti-colonial ideology. *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*, however, can be read as an anti-nationalist novel, in which a Welsh preoccupation with land and descent harms the English in a pathological and highly immoral way. In Vaughan's depiction of the life sciences she negotiates an identity; while she is appreciative and protective of Welsh national identity, she also considers it part of a greater British identity from which it should not be wholly severed. It is an identity that continues to be evaluated and reconstructed throughout Vaughan's work, as we will see in later chapters. What the texts agree on is the need for an alternative to the cruelty and immorality of evolutionary theory in Wales. Vaughan's early texts inhabit an exciting point in Welsh history when science could promote the destruction of Welsh identity or offer the key to an ideal postcolonial relationship with England.

## Chapter Two

### **‘I lost my way in a bog of acquired culture’: Anglo-American Mass and Minority Culture and Welsh Identity in the Novels of Hilda Vaughan**

Nest Owen, the heroine of Vaughan’s 1935 novel, *The Curtain Rises* embarks on a journey which follows a well-trodden path in Welsh literature. Originally from rural Wales, Nest’s family moves to a colliery town in which the innocent young girl finds work as a barmaid and she records the ‘worldly’ conversations overheard there for the plays that she intends to write in the future. In order to realise her ambitions, Nest travels even further – to London – declaring her determination to ‘get on’ and ‘better’ herself.<sup>132</sup> It is a familiar paradigm seen previously in novels such as Allen Raine’s *A Welsh Singer* (1896), for example, in which the hero and heroine travel to London to seek success as a sculptor and a singer respectively, and later in Emlyn Williams’s play, *The Corn is Green* (1938), in which a young Welsh scholar’s education removes him from his community and takes him to Oxford. It was also the path followed by many Anglo-Welsh writers such as Williams, Caradoc Evans, Geraint Goodwin, Arthur Machen and, of course, Vaughan herself, who left Builth Wells for London in 1922 to become an author. Like Vaughan, Nest arrives in the London of the early twentieth-century, at the hub of a vibrant cultural revolution and the text charts her transformation as the Welsh heroine encounters, and is influenced by, aspects of the emerging mass and minority Anglo-American culture that was becoming an increasingly prominent part of British society.

Nest’s diasporic movement away from her rural Welsh roots to produce plays for the London stage is a literal representation of the metaphorical movement within Wales

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<sup>132</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Curtain Rises*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1935), p. 15. All further references are to this edition and are given in the thesis.

as Anglo-American culture became increasingly available to the Welsh. The Elementary Education Act of 1870 implemented the free education of all children in England and Wales between the ages of five and thirteen. It created a literate population in Britain at the turn of the twentieth century, and a largely London-based print culture industry quickly expanded to cater for the needs of this varied mass readership. In Wales the advent of universal education created new opportunities for the Welsh but also heralded a further move towards anglicisation. In addition to this, as David M. Barlow has pointed out, the railways brought an influx of London papers into the principality.<sup>133</sup> Though mass print culture, of course, was not a new phenomenon and can be traced back in various guises for centuries, it was accompanied at this time with other forms of mass culture that were made more readily available than ever to an even greater majority of the population. As part of this movement, the rise of broadcasting in the early twentieth century also saw the radio and the television transmitting programmes from the BBC (founded in 1922, and providing a regular television service from 1936) in London into Welsh homes. The birth of cinema also brought Hollywood films to Welsh audiences. At the turn of the century many films were screened in Welsh music halls and village halls before purpose-built cinemas appeared, with 252 cinemas throughout Wales by 1920. References to this cultural change appear in Vaughan's novels, for example, as Esther and Rhys go to the pictures for the very first time in *The Battle to the Weak* (1925).<sup>134</sup> The effect of the cinema on Wales has been examined by Peter Stead, who describes the

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<sup>133</sup> See David M. Barlow, 'What's in the "Post"? Mass Media as a "Site of Struggle"', *Postcolonial Wales*, eds. Jane Aaron and Chris Williams (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2005), pp. 193-214 (p. 197). All further references are to this edition.

<sup>134</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Battle to the Weak* (New York and London: Harper and Brothers, 1925), p. 48. Rhys tells Esther, '[t]hey've opened a picture-house at Carnau ... It's somethin' quite new, and all the talk o' the countryside.'

‘urban appetites’ it fostered amongst Welsh film-goers.<sup>135</sup> Correspondence between Vaughan and Charles Morgan reveals that the character of Nest was loosely based on a real person’s efforts to educate herself.<sup>136</sup> Vaughan’s decision to transplant her story into a Welsh setting suggests a conscious endeavour to explore the implications of Anglo-American culture for the Welsh individual. *The Curtain Rises* portrays a specifically Welsh encounter with the various facets of Anglo-American mass and minority culture in the 1930s. Similarly, *The Candle and the Light* (1954) portrays the changes in a Welsh border market town from the turn of the century until after the Second World War. Central to the plot is the adulterous affair between the heroine, Grace Felin, and an English fellow-novelist, presenting the Welsh female writer’s literal and metaphorical relationship with English culture. In the background of the text is Grace’s husband’s school with its anglicising effects on the town’s Welsh pupils. While both texts examine the culture of early twentieth-century Britain, *The Curtain Rises* is written in the midst of this cultural change while *The Candle and the Light* provides a later reflection on events. It is perhaps because of this that the two novels present radically different possibilities for the Welsh individual within this period of cultural upheaval.

## I

The protagonists of both novels are avid readers and authors and the texts are self-referential in their treatment of the relationship between the female writer, contemporary

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<sup>135</sup> Peter Stead, ‘Wales and Film’, *Wales Between the Wars*, eds. Trevor Herbert and Gareth Elwyn Jones (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1988), pp. 161-185 (p. 161). All further references are to this edition. See also Gwenno Ffrancon Jenkins, *Cyfaredd y Cysgodion: Delweddu Cymru a’i Phobl ar Ffilm 1935-1951* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), and David Berry, *Wales and Cinema: The First Hundred Years* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1996).

<sup>136</sup> A letter from Charles Morgan to Hilda Vaughan, dated February 10<sup>th</sup>, 1933, refers to a friend of Charles’ who has been contacted by a chorus-girl with whom he had had a romantic dalliance five years previously and who has spend the intervening years educating herself in order to present herself as a suitable wife to him.



literary trends and Welsh identity. Characters in both these novels are continually found discussing literature. In *The Candle and the Light*, two writers and former lovers, Grace and Valentine, are reunited after forty years apart and their first topic of conversation is literature. They find common ground in their disapproval of modern novels.<sup>137</sup> The characters are self-conscious in their references to literature, comparing their own reading habits with those of others. Nest in *The Curtain Rises* writes to her lover, Julian, asking,

please could you tell me what to read next? I would so like to understand all you talk about. Would it put you to too much trouble to write me out a list of *All Your Favourite Books* please?<sup>138</sup>

Julian, in turn, is found asking his friend whether he has read Tchecov (p. 111), adding, ‘Are you a member of the First Edition Club? ... Aren’t you? ... You really should be. It’s worth the while’ (p. 117). Meanwhile, the theatre producer, Stanley Congreve, also in *The Curtain Rises*, can be found entering the house of an acquaintance and ‘[c]rossing the room with a rapid stride, he began at once to examine the novels in the shelves’ (p. 152). Nicola Humble has observed this trope in many novels of the period, remarking that, ‘[m]iddlebrow novels repeatedly portray scenes in which women discuss books, list their favourite authors, or imagine themselves into the plots of their favourite novels.’<sup>139</sup> The latter tendency, as we will see later in the chapter, is taken to extremes in *The Candle and the Light*. While the characters’ self-conscious and anxious relationship with literature is not restricted to the female characters in Vaughan’s texts, its depiction positions *The*

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<sup>137</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Candle and the Light*, (London: Macmillan, 1954), p. 279. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

<sup>138</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Curtain Rises*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1935), p. 147. Emphasis in the original. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

<sup>139</sup> Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 9. All further references are to this edition.

*Curtain Rises* and *The Candle and the Light* within part of a larger debate about literature which was being carried out within the novels of the period.

The characters' preoccupation with what they are reading, or what they should be reading, and what others might be reading, comes at a time when the publishing market was expanding at a rapid pace. As Peter D. Macdonald has pointed out, at the turn of the twentieth century the London-based George Newnes, Harmsworth and C. Arthur Pearson, 'turned the gentlemanly world of Victorian publishing into a large-scale culture industry.'<sup>140</sup> At the 'lower' end of the market, Alfred Harmsworth in 1896 launched the *Daily Mail*, whose slogan was 'the busy man's paper';<sup>141</sup> Ernest Rhys edited Dent's Everyman library from 1906, publishing the largest library of cheaply-priced books before Allen Lane introduced the Penguin paperback books in the 1930s, which made literature affordable and readily available; meanwhile, high modernist literature could also capitalise on its limited demand, 'turning each book into an objet d'art'.<sup>142</sup> The terms 'lowbrow', 'middlebrow' and 'highbrow' also emerged during this time in a bid to differentiate between the bewildering array of varying levels of literature (as well as other forms of culture).<sup>143</sup> The divisions created by these terms were not entirely stable, however, as the 'brows' were often in dialogue and borrowed from each other's

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<sup>140</sup> Peter D. McDonald, 'Modernist Publishing: "Nomads and Mapmakers"', *A Concise Companion to Modernism*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 221-242 (p. 225). All further references are to this edition.

<sup>141</sup> See John Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses: Pride and Prejudice Among the Literary Intelligentsia, 1880-1939* (London: Faber and Faber, 1992), p. 6. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>142</sup> McDonald, *A Concise Companion to Modernism*, p. 223.

<sup>143</sup> According to Robert Graves, the term 'highbrow' originated in America in 1911 and was popularised in Britain by H. G. Wells, while the term 'lowbrow' quickly followed two years later. See Robert Graves and Alan Hodges, *The Long Week-end: A Social History of Great Britain 1918-1939* (1940; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1971), p. 46. The term 'middlebrow' is reputed to have been used in Britain for the first time in the *Daily Express*, 17<sup>th</sup>, June, 1928.

literatures.<sup>144</sup> The difficulty in defining writing according to these categories can also be seen in reviews of Vaughan's own work. A review of *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* in the *New Statesman* in 1932 distances Vaughan's work from highbrow novels, enthusing about how 'satisfying it is to read a novel in which the author's primary desire is not to be bright or terrific or *fin-de-minuit* or Da-da, but to tell us a story.'<sup>145</sup> In contrast, however, in 1935 the *Daily Mail* objected to the highbrow presentation of *A Thing of Nought* which contained the modernist illustrations of Lees-Elliott and unorthodox punctuation and paragraph division. It complains that the illustrations are:

sometimes affected, for to make a woman's head look like a woman's inside can only be called affected. The printing is pleasant, but I cannot see that elaborate asterisks make a new paragraph look more effective.<sup>146</sup>

Vaughan's *Pardon and Peace*, on the other hand, was accused by the *New Statesman* in 1935 of containing the tired clichés 'so common in middlebrow novels.'<sup>147</sup>

While the 'brows' were debatable categories, they point to the tendency at this time to evaluate the reader by their relationship with the books that they were reading.

Megan Benton has argued that:

Books – as particular texts but also increasingly as culturally charged physical objects apart from their specific content – thus bore close scrutiny throughout the 1920s as expressions of the social stature and cultural values of those who owned them.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> For example, 'highbrow' works such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) incorporate references to popular culture. Virginia Woolf in *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (1942) asserts that, 'Lowbrows need highbrows and honour them just as much as highbrows need lowbrows and honour them.' She goes on to scornfully define the middlebrow as the 'betwixt and between'. See Virginia Woolf, *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays* (1942) reproduced at <http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/w/w91d/chap23.html>. Accessed September 10th, 2005.

<sup>145</sup> *New Statesman*, May 7<sup>th</sup>, 1932.

<sup>146</sup> *Daily Mail*, January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1935

<sup>147</sup> *New Statesman*, July 20<sup>th</sup>, 1935.

<sup>148</sup> Megan Benton, "'Too Many Books': Book Ownership and Cultural Identity in the 1920s', *American Quarterly*, vol. 49, no. 2 (June 1997), 268-297 (269).

Though Benton's analysis refers to the situation in America at this time, a similar judgement of characters according to their reading habits can be seen in *The Curtain Rises*. While it could not always be a reliable marker of class hierarchy, reading matter certainly seems to suggest much about the social standing of the reader. When Julian attempts to discuss literature with his dresser, Higgins, at the theatre, the working-class character informs him that he doesn't read much in the way of literature, '[o]nly the racing tips, sir' (p. 129). Nest writes to Julian about the bookshelves of the Graysons, a middle-class family that employs her as a maid-of-all-work. She muses,

Isn't it strange all the books in the best parlour here are only story tales and quite new. The ones that come in paper wrappers are marked price seven shillings and sixpence. I have looked into some when the lady is out. I do not see they are worth such a lot of money. (pp. 130-1)

Nest also comments on the fact that the books aren't read by the family (p. 31). The expensive texts suggest the emerging view of the book as a commodity. Here the middle-class family use texts as 'bookaflage', which Benton identifies as a common practice whereby books were carefully selected by their owners to be seen by others and could reflect the social aspirations of their owners, providing a means to 'impress the neighbours, [and] deliver professional and social advantages'.<sup>149</sup> Vaughan's text suggests that the Graysons are middle-class social climbers while Nest's refusal to see books in these terms implies that she is a more 'sincere' reader. Meanwhile, Julian Ore is of aristocratic stock and has received an expensive private education. His reading preferences include *Ulysses* (p. 75), 'Dowson's poems ... *Les Fleurs du Mal* ... Proust too - *A la Recherche du Temps Perdu*' (p. 75) as well as an array of other markedly highbrow works. Interestingly, all these texts were banned or controversial, suggesting a

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid, pp. 269-270.

relationship between reading and morality that will be explored further below. This suggested connection between class and literature, however, is heavily reliant upon the class structure specific to English society. The Welsh best-selling novelist Allen Raine, whose work was published at the turn of the century, commented that her fiction differed from her English contemporaries in its portrayal of community rather than class, 'the middle and lower classes being so more immediately connected in Wales than in England'.<sup>150</sup> As a Welsh woman, Nest's reading habits defy categorisation according to class and 'brow'. While working as a maid, she shuns her employer's expensive books, as we have seen, favouring the dusty copies of Green's history of England and the works of Shakespeare (p. 131). Nest protests that *Ulysses* 'isn't making sense' (p. 75) but neither is she a fan of the middlebrow novels of P. G. Wodehouse, which she approaches 'with disdain' (p. 76). Since Nest's identity cannot be neatly defined according to her reading tastes, we are led to wonder whether the divisions between highbrow, middlebrow and lowbrow culture are relevant to the Welsh reader. The theatre producer, Stanley Congreve, particularly values Nest's opinions on culture because they are 'original' and 'something fresh' that do not replicate the newspaper reviews (p. 162). Vaughan suggests that the Welsh Nest's relationship with culture is different from all of the English characters that surround her in London. The categories that are used to define identity according to class and culture are revealed as alien constructs that cannot adequately express Welsh identity.

Contemporary anxiety about reading habits was not just about social class, however. The growth of mass culture triggered the belief amongst intellectuals that

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<sup>150</sup> Allen Raine quoted by John Harris in 'Queen of the Rushes: John Harris on Allen Raine and her Public', *Planet* 97 (February / March 1993), 64-72 (64).

British culture was degenerating. Q. D. Leavis expresses the concerns of the elite about the enthusiasm for popular novels:

the information volunteered by a public librarian that many take out two or three novels by Edgar Wallace a week, and the only other books they borrow are 'Sapper's' or other 'thrillers,' suggests that the reading habit is now often a form of the drug habit. In suburban side-streets and even village shops it is common to find a stock of worn and greasy novels let out at 2d. or 3d. a volume; and it is surprising that a clientele drawn from the poorest class can afford to change the books several times a week or even daily, but such is the reading habit that they do.<sup>151</sup>

Though class is an issue here, Q. D. Leavis's language also links cultural degeneracy with moral degeneracy. The conflation of these ideas is reflected in the reading and writing habits of Vaughan's heroines. Q. D. Leavis's notion that reading novels was similar to taking drugs is also suggested in Vaughan's texts as Nest comes across a book in the back of Julian's caravan and reads 'entranced' (p. 42). She consumes the novel like a potent alcohol,

rustling over the pages, four or five at a time, she drained their contents in quick, thirsty gulps, never pausing to drink in one episode to the dregs, but hurrying on to test the flavour of the next. (p. 42)

When this reading frenzy is over, Nest is disorientated and groggy: 'she raised her head and looked about her like one awakening from a dream' (p. 42). Grace in *The Candle and the Light* has been similarly affected by her novel writing, 'and afterwards had slept like one drugged' (p. 126). Vaughan's use of imagery also implies that both women's capacity for critical thinking is dulled as they are seduced by the story.

Reading fiction was a source of particular concern because it was not considered mentally improving. Patrick Brantlinger observes that in the late nineteenth century libraries were considered controversial due to the disproportionate amount of fiction

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<sup>151</sup> Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, (1932; London: Chatto and Windus, 1965), p. 7.

housed there.<sup>152</sup> In *The Candle and the Light* the library is the setting for the adulterous affair between Grace and Valentine. As the gossip, Mrs Evans, informs her friends, '[i]t seems he scraped an acquaintance with her at the lending library. Without any introduction - or so I understand' (p. 6). This, of course is not a new trope; it has ancient precedents, for example, Dante shows Paolo and Francesca in the Inferno as having been tempted to sexual transgression by reading a book together. In a similar manner, reading novels becomes intertwined with sexuality and impropriety in Vaughan's texts. Julian reads books that Nest describes as 'not very Christian' (p.72) and he confesses that he prefers writing 'with less "moral uplift"' (p. 77). It subsequently comes as no surprise to discover that he is a serial womaniser who seduces the innocent Nest. In fact, it is reading that leads to Nest's partial seduction as Julian kisses her when she is upset at the cruel fate dealt to the protagonist of *Jude the Obscure* (p. 92). Moreover, in *The Candle and the Light*, reading and writing become a substitute for sex. Grace sees the novel she has written about her relationship with Valentine and the text that he has also written about their love as a 'method of communication between them' (p. 166). In effect, their lovemaking is carried out in print. In this manner, Grace's reading of her own novel and the feelings that accompany it can be seen as an act of masturbation:

Her face burned with excitement, she sat down on a hall chair. So overwhelming was her pleasure that she shut her eyes tight. She was the authoress of a novel in print! (p. 141)

While Vaughan's depiction of reading and writing novels engages with contemporary debates in English society, it also has interesting postcolonial implications. Nest and Grace's involvement with the English-language novel also directly leads to their

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<sup>152</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), p. 20.

seduction by untrustworthy English men. Their reading habits set the innocent heroines upon a path towards corruption as Grace commits adultery with Valentine Gould and Nest has pre-marital sex with Julian Ore. For the Welsh heroine of Vaughan's novels, the encounter with English culture is negatively portrayed as an influence that leads to acts of literal as well as cultural miscegenation.

The text's disapproval of the introduction of mass Anglo-American culture into Wales is implicit in the negative imagery which is used to portray its various manifestations in *The Curtain Rises*. In a description of the colliery town, which is Nest's home at the beginning of the narrative, we are told that '[i]n the gutter lay newspapers and discarded cigarette packets' (p. 25). The newspaper in the gutter recalls the growth of the sensationalist press during this time and, while the text does not explicitly state whether the newspapers are of English origin, the fact that they are littering and sully the Welsh town is highly suggestive. In fact, reading mass-produced popular newspapers, like the popular literature that we saw earlier, seems to be the first step towards the indulgence of the Welsh in other aspects of Anglo-American mass culture. In *The Curtain Rises* Nest's family sit in the modest and practically-furnished kitchen of a farmhouse on the side of a mountain. Nest's brother-in-law is a conspicuous figure in these traditional surroundings:

He was sprawling in a plush chair. The other seats in the kitchen were of wood. Across his knees lay a copy of the *Daily Herald*. As he spoke, he took another Woodbine out of his imitation gold case and lit it from the stump of the cigarette between his lips. (p. 12)

Again, though the newspaper that he reads is English-language it is unclear whether it is one of the many London-based papers that were brought into Wales. It is aligned, however, with many of the material luxuries that accompanied the rise of mass culture



such as ready-to-wear fashion which positions the newspaper as part of this array of modern commodities. Despite being an out-of-work miner, he wears 'a townsman's dark suit, with a scarlet tie and the back of his neck shaved American fashion' (p. 12). The tone of this description is one of disapproval. His comfort and leisure contrast with the discomfort of the rest of the family (who sit on the wooden, rather than the plush, seats) and sense of toil suggested by the surroundings of the farmhouse. The newspaper, cigarette and imitation gold case are the paraphernalia provided by mass culture as a social disguise for the Welsh working man, promising him elevation within an English-style social class system while their lack of authenticity simultaneously betrays his lowly origin. The text seems suspicious of the trappings of modernity, which are portrayed as mendacious constructs which are used to hide the collier's true Welsh identity. He is the embodiment of modernity and a foreign dominant culture who, despite his plush chair, sits awkwardly in the traditional Welsh setting.

The expansion of mass culture during the twentieth century, then, was a time of great potential cultural change and reinvention for Wales, as well as Britain as a whole. Culture became a site of ideological struggle at this time, with various opposing groups and individuals attempting to assert some form of control over the culture in flux. It was what F. R. Leavis deemed a time of culture in crisis in his first work *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (1930) and he and his followers attempted to reinforce and safeguard the established canon, which they perceived as under threat from mass culture, in works such as *The Great Tradition* (1948). Meanwhile, high modernists attempted to open up the canon. In *A Room of One's Own* (1929), for example, Virginia Woolf argues

for the inclusion of female writers in the literary canon.<sup>153</sup> In addition, Nicola Humble has pointed out the extent that book clubs exerted power over authors at this time, demanding revisions and changes of the author before they would order their novels.<sup>154</sup> Infamous censorship battles were fought over Radclyffe Hall's *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) and *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) by D. H. Lawrence. Even Vaughan's *Iron and Gold* (1948) was banned in Ireland due to its perceived indecency or obscenity.<sup>155</sup> While authors were controlled in this way, they in turn, attempted to control the way in which their writing was read. Many writers expressed concern that the new mass readership would not read in a discerning manner, or would misread their novels. According to Virginia Woolf, the new reader

differs from the critic or the scholar. He is worse educated, and nature has not gifted him so generously. He reads for his own pleasure rather than to impart knowledge or correct the opinions of others.<sup>156</sup>

Writers and critics such as Virginia Woolf attempted to re-educate the newly literate masses. In *The Common Reader* (1932) Woolf attempts to guide the reader, shaping his or her reading of various canonical texts. Such an attempt was a bid to exert power over the reader and thus secure the future role of the intellectual within literature. It betrays, however, a deep feeling of unease. The future of culture, it seemed, was in the hands of the masses, or at least in the influence that could be exerted over them. The tensions surrounding the masses are manifested in *The Curtain Rises*, in which crowds are described in ambivalent terms. At a party Nest and Stanley survey the room 'teeming

<sup>153</sup> See Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1928; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973).

<sup>154</sup> Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel*, p. 44

<sup>155</sup> In a letter from Rache Lovat Dickson at Macmillan and Co. to Hilda Vaughan dated February 11<sup>th</sup>, 1949, Dickson writes, '*Iron and Gold* has been prohibited by the Censorship of Publication Board of Eire as being "indecent or obscene", a description which it is nonsense to apply to this book.' Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>156</sup> Virginia Woolf, *The Common Reader*, (1925; London: Penguin, 1938), p. 11. All further references are to this edition.

with live people' (p. 303). Stanley finds the scene discouraging and is contemptuous of what he calls the 'mob' who all 'lead the same vapid lives' while Nest's view is more hopeful, responding, 'don't you see, they're all leading different lives - exciting, intensely important to themselves?' (p. 303). The text seems to swing between the two viewpoints as Nest's justification of the mob is soon reversed when she sits in a theatre surveying the audience:

wherever she looked, were rows of pale expressionless faces, all staring in one direction, all blank as little ovals of paper, not yet written upon. This mob seemed to be waiting, with the apathy of a monster idiot, to be fed with whatever ready-made emotion might be set before it. (p. 364)

While the mob here is an English audience, many of the fears surrounding mob mentality can be connected with Wales. Fears about the mob's unruly behaviour as a danger to society were provoked by events in Wales such as the Tonypandy riots of 1910 and the Llanelli railwaymen's strike of 1911 in which two strikers were shot dead. Welsh mobs have been sympathetically portrayed by other Welsh women writers such as Amy Dillwyn in *The Rebecca Rioter* (1880) and much later, Menna Gallie in *Strike for a Kingdom* (1959). Vaughan's depiction of the mob is more ambiguous. In *The Curtain Rises* the mob is a collection of paper faces upon which mass culture could inscribe an ideology. The inclusion of this image in a text that examines the effect of Anglo-American culture on the Welsh individual seems to invite a postcolonial reading that considers the implications for a Welsh audience. The struggle over mass culture, as has been suggested, was also a site of colonial struggle. The little paper faces were there to be written upon, but with whose ideology would they be inscribed?

## II

While Vaughan's texts explore the anxiety provoked by universal education and mass culture in England, they also suggest that their effects on Welsh identity were even more disconcerting. Gareth Elwyn Jones and Gordon Wynne Roderick have argued that education initiatives in Wales were a direct response to even earlier fears of the Welsh mob, not unlike that described above. They state that, "'fear of the mob" which had been engendered by the traumatic events of the 1830s was also a powerful factor' in the founding of new schools in Wales.<sup>157</sup> In fact, the notorious 1847 Enquiry into the State of Education in Wales, with its emphasis on the anglicisation of the Welsh, was carried out after William Williams, Radical M.P. for Coventry suggested that 'an improved system of schooling was the best means to bring about "law and order."' <sup>158</sup> The County Schools that were established in Wales as a result of the education reforms of the 1870s were an anglicising influence. They replaced the Sunday Schools as the principal means of education in Wales, largely displacing a movement that had 'created a reading public in Wales anxious for more reading material in the vernacular.'<sup>159</sup> The view of the school system as a form of colonial control is expressed by Amos Rhys in *The Candle and the Light* who tells Grace, '[w]hen I was a little lumper, we were punished in school for speaking our own mother-tongue. A Church school, it was; and a Felin sat on the board ...' (p. 258). Peter Felin, Grace's husband, continues to be involved with a grammar school that produces anglicised students. Peter's own son, Edward, is contemptuous of Amos Rhys and, following an argument, declares his refusal 'to take orders shouted in "Welshy" English by a ruffian who had been to the Board School!' (p. 175).

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<sup>157</sup> Gareth Elwyn Jones and Gordon Wynne Roderick, *A History of Education in Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2003), p. 61. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>158</sup> See Jones and Roderick, *A History of Education in Wales*, p. 58.

<sup>159</sup> T. M. Bassett, 'The Sunday School', *The History of Education in Wales 1*, eds. Jac L. Williams and Gwilym Rees Hughes (Swansea: Christopher Davies, 1978), pp. 70-82 (p. 78).

In *The Curtain Rises*, Nest's self-education leads to her increasing involvement with English culture. The effects of education on the Welsh here are conveyed in ambivalent terms. Education is presented as a positive and necessary influence on Nest, who is frustrated by her lack of eloquence: 'I'm lacking words – education. I'm feeling as if I should *burst* for not being able to express what's inside my head – joy and pain and wonder, all struggling to come out and *make* something' (p. 85). Her words recall those of the former collier, Morgan Evans, in Emlyn Williams's play *The Corn is Green*, who wins a scholarship to Oxford University. On visiting the English university he feels able to express himself for the first time:

The words came pouring out of me – all the words that I had learnt and written down and never spoken – I suppose I was talking nonsense, but I was at least holding a conversation! I suddenly realised that I'd never done it before – I had never been *able* to do it. (*With a strong Welsh accent.*) "How are you, Morgan? Nice day, Mr. Jones! Not bad for the harvest! – a vocabulary of twenty words..."<sup>160</sup>

Morgan's words, and to an extent also Nest's, suggest that education is a form of liberation, allowing a means of escape from the intellectually stifling communities that they inhabit. Jones and Roderick state that

It is one of the fascinating aspects of the history of Welsh secondary education that it has not only been accepted but a matter of pride in Welsh communities when those who prospered in the system changed their status and left the community.<sup>161</sup>

This is certainly the case in *The Corn is Green* in which the entire community turn out to cheer Morgan on his permanent departure from the district.<sup>162</sup> In Nest's case, however, the community is less celebratory. A childhood friend informs Nest that she 'has not been

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<sup>160</sup> Emlyn Williams, *The Corn is Green* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1938). III.i (p. 104). All further references are to this edition.

<sup>161</sup> Jones and Roderick, *A History of Education in Wales*, p. 90.

<sup>162</sup> Williams, *The Corn is Green*, III.i.

faithful to Wales ... You've turned into a London lady now... [with] that English way you have of speaking' (p. 422).

Indeed much of Nest's anglicisation is focused on her voice. Even her English suitor tells her that he is 'half sorry that you've lost your Welsh singsong' (p. 225). When her benefactress, Ruth Fremlyn, asks her to sing, Nest's immediate response is to sing English and Irish folk songs instead of the Welsh hymns she used to favour, to which Ruth responds 'My dear child! Don't you know any of your country's folk songs?' (p. 183). This realises a fear expressed by W. B. Yeats, who lamented the loss of what he viewed as an essence of Irishness that had been discarded as the Irish became more educated and forgot the folk tales of their race's past.<sup>163</sup> In effect, Nest has literally and metaphorically lost her Welsh voice and thus her ability to portray the experience of her nation in her work. Nest admits that as she read more and more she 'was overwhelmed. Swamped by finding how much I had to learn from the English ... I lost my way in a bog of acquired culture' (pp. 425-6). Julian doubts the benefits of her endeavours to better herself. He warns her, '[i]t might not improve you, my dear, to become a self-made person. You're very sweet as you are' (p. 73). His question of whether anglicising education was appropriate for the Welsh individual is explored by the text as a whole. The influence of education in estranging individuals from the Welsh community is a common concern in Anglophone Welsh writing, also examined, for example, in Emyr Hymphreys's *A Toy Epic* (1958) and Bertha Thomas's short story, 'The Way he Went' (1912). For Nest, the experience is ultimately fatal. She begins the novel as a healthy country girl, a teetotal non-smoker and ends a chain-smoking drinker, tired and haggard.

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<sup>163</sup> W. B. Yeats quoted by Todd Avery and Patrick Brantlinger in 'Reading and Modernism: "'Mind Hungers' Common and Uncommon'", *A Concise Companion to Modernism*, ed. David Bradshaw (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), pp. 243-261 (p. 246).

She admits that writing has, ‘torn me to pieces’ (p. 402). Nest dies soon after at the age of only thirty and her sister, Annie, attributes it to her pursuit of knowledge. She points out that Nest has done ‘[n]othing only read and write ... And what for? It’s worn the flesh off your bones, and hasn’t made you that rich, in the end’ (pp. 467-8). While Vaughan suggests that the working-class Welsh are perfectly capable of success in intellectual endeavours, she is also hesitant to portray their education as a positive marker of progress. This wariness is repeated elsewhere in Vaughan’s work. For example, in an unpublished story from her juvenilia, ‘An old Character’, the farmer, David Jones, tells a visiting London gentleman about an old, eccentric local man: ‘[h]e’s a regular character is old Joseph, but he’s the last o’ his sort we’ll see in these part: the schoolin is makin everyone alike. They are all one pattern now.’<sup>164</sup> Like the loss of Nest’s accent, the story suggests that, despite its positive effects, the education of the Welsh brings about a lamentable loss of identity.

While Vaughan depicts the negative transformation of the Welsh due to their education and increasing indoctrination by English culture, she also portrays the difficulties in finding a space for Welsh identity within English mass culture. Vaughan was all too aware of the difficulty in persuading London publishers to print Welsh-based novels as we will see in depth in chapter seven of this thesis. In *The Curtain Rises*, it is the London stage and its audiences, however, which inhibits Welsh identity. Writing to Julian of her frustrations as a playwright, Nest laments that her dramas ‘were

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<sup>164</sup> Hilda Vaughan, ‘An Old Character’ from her unpublished, uncatalogued juvenilia. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan. This view is later reinforced in Vaughan’s autobiographical essay, ‘Far Away: Not Long Ago’, in which Vaughan expresses her relief that ‘[u]niform education and easy communications have not – as yet – robbed them [the locals of Builth Wells] all of their rustic individuality’, and ‘[i]n spite of the B.B.C., they have kept their engaging sing-song’. Hilda Vaughan, ‘Far Away: Not Long Ago’, *Radnorshire Society Transactions*, vol. LIII (1982) 19-26 (25).

either too gloomy or about Wales, so no management would risk putting them on' (p. 331). Vaughan herself, however, did succeed in writing plays that were produced upon the London stage. *She, Too, Was Young* (1938), set in Vaughan's native countryside played for three months in 1938 at Wyndham's Theatre, while her novel, *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* (1932) was adapted for the stage by Dorothy Massingham and Laurier Lister and was even broadcast by the BBC on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 1957. A letter from Vaughan to Morgan shows that Vaughan was aware, however, of the sense of apathy with which Welsh plays were often received. Vaughan quotes a friend's comments on a play written by Gertrude Painter (with whom Vaughan had previously collaborated, as we saw in the introduction to this thesis) that despite its merit, 'no one in town, of course, can be expected to take any interest in stuff about Wales', to which Vaughan has added an indignant exclamation mark.<sup>165</sup>

One reason proposed for this indifference in *The Curtain Rises* is the fact that the attitudes and needs of the English middle class dictate terms to almost every aspect of the commercial London theatre. When the critic, Edward Ironsides, and Nest co-write a historical drama, many of its scenes are cut because the producer must '[t]hink of the suburban trains home' (p. 291). As the patron of the arts, Saul Alcazan, explains to Nest:

a lot of the women come up from the suburbs just to see what's being worn ... And men like the spectacle of a pretty actress in *décolletage*. Besides, actors in evening dress means that the play has a luxurious setting. It makes the audience feel costly - and safe. They don't go to a show after dinner to be reminded about the unemployed. (p. 308)

While this cynical view of culture was, no doubt, the result of common experience, Alcazan's description of the average London play is in stark contrast to Welsh dramas

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<sup>165</sup> Letter from Hilda Vaughan to Charles Morgan, written from Pendine on September 14<sup>th</sup>, 1926. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.



that actually succeeded in making their way to the capital's stage. J.O. Francis's *Change* (1912), for example, was based on the railwaymen's strike at Llanelli in 1911 and was performed in London and New York in 1912 to critical acclaim.<sup>166</sup> In Vaughan's text, however, there is only one role for the Welsh character within drama staged in London. Nest writes to Julian of her only success to date:

at last I wrote a little comedy, which I thought very trivial. It was about the humours of a literary family - who lived in Bloomsbury and employed a Welsh maid of all work (myself of course!). She kept on supplying them - being herself unconsciously exploited - with all the fresh ideas and emotions they lacked. The rather sordidly amusing drama of the piece, lay in their battles and manoeuvres, each of them, to use her only for himself. It made people laugh: mainly, I'm afraid, because I had taught the leading lady to speak with a Welsh accent. Londoners think that funny. That is why, perhaps, I have failed to get my serious Welsh plays put on ... I meant my little heroine to be a pathetic character, and her pretentiously 'cultured' employers to be the figures of fun. But the producer ... saw otherwise, and I could not stand by, watching with disgust my tragi-comedy turned into a farce. (p. 331)

The producer subverts Nest's writing in an act of colonial reinterpretation. The only role for a Welsh person in mass culture conceivable to this English producer and his audience is that of the fool. Interestingly, it is precisely this stereotype of the Welsh that Emyln Williams is attributed with having disposed of in his plays and films during the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>167</sup> Vaughan's text is set just before the positive cultural influence of Williams and presents the London stage as a frustrating and discouraging place for the Welsh playwright.

Given the contemporary cultural climate, it is unsurprising that Nest returns to her hometown in Wales where her play is being staged for the very first time. In Wales,

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<sup>166</sup> See M. Wynn Thomas, *Internal Difference* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), pp. 1-24. See also, Cecil Price, 'Towards a National Theatre for Wales', *Anglo-Welsh Review* (1962), 12-15 (20). Price describes how London 'critics vied with each other in complimenting the author.'

<sup>167</sup> See Don Dale-Jones, *Emlyn Williams*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1979), p. 96: 'He brought Wales to the stage as a distinct nation with deeply rooted traditions, Welsh people as fully rounded human beings with admirable as well as comic qualities (it is to be hoped that he has disposed for ever of the grotesque stereotypes that represented his country on the English stage for so long).'

attitudes towards the drama are shown to be very different. The acting company and the audience are made up of the working and lower-middle classes. The narrative informs us that ‘the impression conveyed by this group of voluble Welsh folk was one of friendly animation, of attractive, lively personality. There were no faces, here, marred by the boredom, real or affected, of the English upper classes’ (p. 419). This description stands in stark contrast to the mob-like description of the English theatre audience that we saw earlier. Nest’s guide, a local woman, apologises for the company’s acting skills in advance, explaining, ‘[t]he drama is newer to us in Wales’ (p. 420). Vaughan’s text alludes to the ascent of the theatre in Wales in the beginning of the twentieth century, particularly during the period from 1910-1914, following calls from figures such as O. M. Edwards and Lloyd George for the support of Welsh drama and the endeavours of Lord Howard de Walden to establish a National Theatre for Wales.<sup>168</sup> A number of notable Welsh playwrights emerged during this time in both languages, such as J. O. Francis, R. G. Berry, D. T. Davies and D. J. Gruffydd and the performance of plays was included as a category in the National Eisteddfod of 1915.<sup>169</sup> Welsh drama was played predominantly by amateur actors at this time.<sup>170</sup> The play in Vaughan’s text is no different and is staged in ‘the drab parlour of the Temperance Café’ (p. 419) by amateur actors (p 420).

Vaughan was actively supportive of such amateur acting companies in Wales, as her

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<sup>168</sup> See O. Llew Owain, *Hanes y Ddrama yng Nghymru 1850-1943* (Liverpool: Hugh Evans a’i Feibion Cyf., Gwasg y Brython, 1948), p. 33. All further references are to this edition. Owain refers to Edwards’s suggestion that the interludes of *Twm o’r Nant* be played again in *Cymru* (September, 1910). See also Cecil Price, ‘Towards a National Theatre for Wales’, p. 16: ‘At the Bangor National Eisteddfod of 1902, Lloyd George spoke eloquently on the need for a school of Welsh drama.’

<sup>169</sup> Owain, *Hanes y Ddrama yng Nghymru*, p. 114. The intention had been to include the drama in the National Eisteddfod of 1914 but this was postponed due to the outbreak of the First World War.

<sup>170</sup> Lists of the various amateur dramatic companies in Wales at this time appear throughout Owain’s *Hanes y Ddrama yng Nghymru*.

correspondence attests. A letter from Richard Hughes to Vaughan in 1924 thanks the author for allowing the Porthmadog players to rehearse in one of her properties.<sup>171</sup>

In *The Curtain Rises* the local dramatic society is enthusiastic and outward looking, 'Ibsen they've been playing and all sorts' (p. 420). This reflects the influence of the Norwegian playwright on Welsh drama, for example, in *Beddau'r Proffwydi* (1913) by W. J. Gruffydd.<sup>172</sup> Vaughan's novel reveals her detailed knowledge as well an active involvement in the cultural development of Wales.

In fact, as Nest returns to Wales, Vaughan's text seems to consciously engage in the discussion of Welsh drama that was taking place in the society of the time. This is particularly evident in a scene in which Nest travels on a local bus and is joined by her fellow passengers in a passionate discussion of the role of the theatre in Welsh society. The conflicting views of an 'old-fashioned farmer', the Reverend Jonas Lloyd, a young working man and Nest echo the arguments that were taking place in the Welsh newspapers and periodicals of the time, in particular, in the pages of the *Welsh Outlook*.<sup>173</sup> The farmer looks back to the days when 'the theatre was reckoned a terrible worldly, if not downright wicked place' (p. 433) and is countered by the reverend's opinion that its pleasures are harmless 'so long as it does not tend to the spread of depravity' (p. 434). Their views are reminiscent of articles such as that by Abel Jones, a Nonconformist minister, who responded to earlier Nonconformist condemnation of the theatre in milder terms, suggesting that, 'the drama of a nation must present a consistent

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<sup>171</sup> Letter from Richard Hughes to Hilda Vaughan dated February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1924. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan. It is unclear to which property the letter refers.

<sup>172</sup> See Hywel Teifi Edwards, *Codi'r Hen Wlad yn ei Hôl* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1989), p. 290.

<sup>173</sup> See for example, Saunders Lewis, 'The Present State of Welsh Drama', *Welsh Outlook* (1919), 302-4 and Saunders Lewis, 'Welsh Drama and Folk Drama', *Welsh Outlook* (1920), 167-8.

moral ideal.’<sup>174</sup> For the young worker, the theatre should provide a means of education and he desires ‘more realistic plays depicting the injustice of the present social order’ (p. 435), which recalls the plays of J. O. Francis and W. J. Gruffydd. The discussion is concluded with Nest’s argument that her art should be separated from all these concerns and be derived purely from an ‘individual truth’ (p. 436). Though Nest’s comments cannot, of course, be read as representing Vaughan’s own view, they certainly show that her work was contributing to the forum of debate in Wales.

As we have seen, much of this discussion was centred on what the drama could do for Wales. On her return to her home country, Nest considers her own writing in similar terms, placing it within the context of Welsh literature and the future of the nation as a whole. She tells the audience assembled at her play that she has followed the English rules that govern her craft but, ‘[n]ow, perhaps, I’m ready to discard them - to let whatever is national in me, in the least restricted sense, breakout in the poetry that is in our blood’ (p. 424). Her words recall the advice given in the *Welsh Outlook* by Saunders Lewis, who urged Welsh dramatists to ‘study the methods of great dramatists of all countries and ages’ but ‘never be divorced from our own familiar civilization.’<sup>175</sup> Nest suggests that the clash of cultures that has influenced her own writing encapsulates the experience of the nation:

Perhaps as a race, too, we are going through a difficult and painful transition - from what we no longer can believe, through a desert of ugliness and disillusion - groping our way towards the new beauty we yearn to create. (p. 426)

Nest’s return to Wales seems to mark a transitional point as she breaks away from the overwhelming influence of English culture and provokes an awareness of her native

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<sup>174</sup> Abel Jones, ‘Does Wales Need the Drama?’, *Welsh Outlook* (1914), 254-6 (255).

<sup>175</sup> Lewis, *Welsh Outlook* (1919), pp. 304, 302.

culture and national identity that, it is suggested, will colour her work in the future. Hers is a symbolic return which reverses the paradigm of the exiled artist seen in novels such as James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916) in which Stephen Dedalus, in his writing, attempts 'to forge in the smithy of [his] soul the uncreated conscience of [his] race' but can only do this by leaving his homeland behind, to 'fly by those nets' of 'nationality, language, religion.'<sup>176</sup> In contrast, it is Nest's return to Wales that unlocks her true creative potential.

Similarly, Grace's prose writing in *The Candle and the Light* plays an important role in the construction of her national identity. Reactions to her work mark the lines that divide her border community. Grace's short stories are published in Amos Rhys' Welsh nationalist-leaning newspaper and are disapproved of by the anglicised townspeople. The schoolmistress, Miss Pratt, dismisses them as 'the rubbish she scribbles' (p. 5), while Grace's mother-in-law describes them as 'hardly edifying' and '[i]mproper'. She warns Grace that she has

re-read your last fairy tale. Very prettily written, I'm sure. But I confess it struck me as ... somewhat over-emotional. The episode of the kiss... In Mrs Williams's judgement, it would be best for Peter's prospects if you dropped your connection with *The Border Gazette*. (pp. 28-9)

The Welsh-speaking characters, however, are filled with enthusiasm for Grace's writing. Her champion in the town is the patriotic Welshman, Amos Rhys, who publishes her stories but she also finds admiration among the hill-farmers. Grace's childhood nurse, Nannie fach, has collected a book full of all of Grace's stories cut from the newspapers. She takes it 'reverently' from the parlour, '[t]he proper place, of course, for this treasure was beside the family Bible on a mat which she had crocheted in red string to mark its

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<sup>176</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. R. B. Kershner (1916; Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 1993), pp. 177, 218.

importance' (pp. 103-4). The book is '[m]ade to abide' (p. 103) in contrast with the cheap reprints of mass-culture novels that characterise the modern view of the book as a commodity that we saw earlier. Nannie's daughter-in-law, Sarah Jones, asks Nest 'why aren't you writing us one o' those pretty fairy tales' (p. 106). Her phrasing suggests that Grace's stories are written specifically for the Welsh people. Moreover, Grace's choice of fairy stories and her use of magic and the supernatural link her work not only with Vaughan's own *Iron and Gold* (1948) but also with the ancient Welsh tales of the *Mabinogion*. Grace's Mabinogion-style tales favoured by the Welsh *gwerin* hark back to a mythical glory-age for Wales and establish her as a nationalist writer in opposition to the colonial influence of English culture.

### III

Both *The Curtain Rises* and *The Candle and the Light* focus specifically on the role of the Welsh female writer. Central to the construction of Nest as writer of and for her nation is the curiously large number of references to writing and blood in *The Curtain Rises*. Writing is continually described as an act of bloodshed. As a very young woman, Nest describes to Julian the manner in which authors of books 'have torn out their living hearts for you to read' (p. 78). Writing becomes an act of self-sacrifice. At first this imagery appears to describe the real experience of pain that is necessary in the writer in order to fuel his or her art. Embarking in earnest upon her writing career, Nest tells Stanley, 'I realise now that everything my characters are and feel has to be torn out of my innermost heart and written with my own blood' (p. 300). Later, it also connotes the complex mixture of love and pain implicit in Nest's writing. She describes her play that reflects her bitter experiences at the reckless hands of Julian as 'written in blood' (p.

404). Interestingly, references to blood also frequently appear in the discussion of Welsh drama. J. O. Francis stated in 1913 that the new drama in Wales was the result of ‘a real impulse of Nationalism in the blood of the new generation...’<sup>177</sup> Similarly, in 1914 the *Cambria Daily Leader* reported a speech made by Harley Granville Baker at a reception in honour of the Welsh National Drama Company at the Swansea Grand Theatre, which makes a similar reference:

It seemed to him that the development of their national art was a thing of vital and great necessity to their national life.... The greatest service that Wales could render to the world was to be herself to the last drop of her blood.<sup>178</sup>

The idea that in the symbolic blood of the nation flows the essence, traditions and identity of the Welsh people can be found in *The Curtain Rises*. Towards the end of the novel, Nest vows that in the act of writing she will ‘let whatever is national in me, in the least restricted sense, break out in the poetry that’s in our blood’ (p. 424). Mr Williams assures Nest that such a sacrifice is what her nation requires of her: ‘[t]hat’s what we’re looking to you, and to others, to write for us out of your heart’s blood’ (p. 426). The image of a revered individual, representative of the nation, who produces a work of literature, viewed as an act of dutiful bloodletting on behalf of his or her people, is a curious amalgamation of the figures of the Bard and the Scapegoat. Literature is presented a metaphorical cultural bloodline, passing the traditions from one generation to the next. This is also particularly appropriate in the case of the Welsh female author, evoking the blood shed in childbirth, which suggests that her writing will give birth to a Welsh future. The maternal custodianship of culture is an idea that we have already encountered in chapter one of this thesis in the construction of the nation-building mother; as we saw

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<sup>177</sup> J. O. Francis, ‘The New Welsh Drama’, *Wales* (November 1913), 6-7.

<sup>178</sup> *Cambria Daily Leader*, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1914.

then, this role is an ambivalent one for the woman who is elevated to God-like status but is simultaneously duty-bound to shoulder the burden on behalf of the nation. The lifeblood of Welsh literature is a symbol of hope for Welsh culture, heralding a progressive future as well as the memories of the nation's past. This also elevates the status of the female writer in the construction of national culture, displacing the idea of national literature as a male preserve, in particular the notion that Welsh fiction in English was exclusively 'fathered' by figures such as Caradoc Evans.

The female author's relationship with her nation, however, is also complicated by issues of gender. This is explored in both *The Curtain Rises* and *The Candle and the Light* as Nest and Grace's writing, and its symbolic implications for the nation, is challenged by their experiences as women. Nest is left to wonder whether instead of writing, 'should I not, perhaps, have served my Maker and my race better, had I married an honest citizen and reared children to labour for either God or State?' (p. 459). Her questioning of female duty and art are reminiscent of the issues raised at this time in *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf, which explores the constraints placed on female writers by the demands of patriarchal society.<sup>179</sup> Both of Vaughan's texts raise the question of whether the artist can ever override the woman within the female writer. It is certainly not the case for Nest. In her dying letter to Julian, Nest writes:

By women, art is seldom faithfully served for itself alone. I wonder if that is true. Yes, I think, for us, it is a substitute for love, or an oblation to it. That is why, perhaps, we are seldom, or never, in the first flight as artists. (p. 464)

Nest destroys her finest play for love of Julian, significantly choosing her English suitor over her art. She chooses the ties of gender over those of nationality. Nest dies before she

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<sup>179</sup> See Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, (1928; London: Penguin, 1973). All further references are to this edition.



can realise her vow to write the Welsh play that discards English conventions, which hitherto have stifled her writing. Similarly, Grace ceases to write for a very long period because of a promise made to her own English lover, Valentine. According to Grace, in the struggle between her love and her art,

[o]ne had to choose; she had made her choice; and henceforward, without rebellion or bitterness, would make her life's pattern from materials in which personal material had no place. (p. 173)

Both Nest and Grace sacrifice their writing for their love of English men. Interestingly, Vaughan merges the restrictions of the female role in patriarchal society with the colonial relationship between the English and the Welsh as forces which impede Welsh women's writing.

In giving up their writing, Nest and Grace are also forfeiting their access to a medium that awarded a modest but significant new-found power to women in early twentieth-century British society. The middlebrow market was often dominated by women, with female authors achieving high sales amongst a readership that was also largely comprised of women. Vaughan herself was part of this cultural movement. In an article entitled, 'Women on the Shelf' in the *Glasgow Bulletin* in 1936, it is reported that,

[t]his will be remembered among publishers as the year when women scored. My bookseller tells me that more than three-quarters of the best-sellers of the moment are by women, and instances Mary Borden's 'Action for Slander,' Vera Brittain's 'Honourable Estate,' Ann Bridge's 'Song in the House,' Hilda Vaughan's 'Harvest Home,' and Agatha Christie's 'Cards on the Table.'<sup>180</sup>

Q. D. Leavis observes the important effect of women on the output of libraries, claiming, '[i]t is significant that the proportion of fiction to non-fiction borrowed is overwhelmingly great, that women rather than men change the books.'<sup>181</sup> With fears that

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<sup>180</sup> *Glasgow Bulletin*, November 19<sup>th</sup>, 1936.

<sup>181</sup> Q. D. Leavis, *Fiction and the Reading Public*, p. 7.

culture was becoming 'feminised', women and fiction were written into many of the debates of the cultural elite.<sup>182</sup> The Welsh woman had also been the particular object of discussion in many texts over the years. She was the focus of numerous examples of what Stephen Knight has termed 'first-contact romance', tales of colonial romantic adventure between the Welsh and English, a rash of which appears in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries;<sup>183</sup> and a genre which Vaughan can be read as developing and commenting on in the postcolonial romances between the English and Welsh in both *The Curtain Rises* and *The Candle and the Light*. Welsh women had also, of course, been examined far too closely for their liking in the 1847 Blue Books Report. In *The Candle and the Light*, Grace Felin appears as a woman entrapped within text. At various points in the novel she is depicted as a stereotypical heroine from different types of fiction. We first see her as the melodramatic protagonist of a sentimental romance, waiting in the woods for her symbolically-named lover, Valentine, 'the hero of every romance she had ever read herself into as a girl' (p. 11). Later she roams the mountains deep in thought, 'Here, she felt uncaged as the buzzards wheeling overhead and beneath her in limitless space' (p. 114). At home in the wilderness, more comfortable in solitude, she fulfils the role of the orphaned child of sensibility in gothic novels and novels of sentiment or recalls the wilderness-loving heroines of Allen Raine. When Grace smiles at a young farm boy, his grandmother observes that he is '[m]oon struck... He should have kept his gaze upon earth' (p. 107). Grace is depicted as an unearthly creature like a fairy or a sprite. She becomes a character from the fairy-tales she tells, or an enchantress from folk tales such as the *Mabinogion*. She is, in an obvious sense, the character in Vaughan's

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<sup>182</sup> See Carey, *The Intellectuals and the Masses*, p. 8

<sup>183</sup> See Stephen Knight, 'First-Contact Tales and Romances', *A Hundred Years of Fiction*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), pp. 10-15.

novel, but she is also depicted as a character in her own novel about her relationship with Valentine, a character in his novel *Border Ballad*, also recording their love, the subject of Peter Felin's poetry, and an object fictionalised in the idealised love of Amos Rhys. While she is a passive object in the fictions constructed around her by male characters, her own novel, which fictionalises her relationship with Valentine, shows her as complicit in this as she essentially writes herself into first-contact romance. Late in the novel when she encounters Valentine after years apart, through a quirk in the plot, they speak to each other using the third person to describe themselves as if they were characters and Grace becomes the subject of yet another novel planned by Valentine (p. 288). Trapped in so many layers of fiction, Grace embodies the role of women in text, continually inscribed and reinscribed with meaning.

Valentine's final textualisation of Grace is particularly vampiric. She discovers that her long-cherished love for him is no longer reciprocated and is distraught. Believing that Grace has killed herself, Valentine tries to find her body in a pool in the woods:

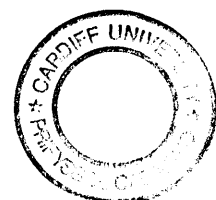
No matter if it haunted him for the rest of his days, see her dead face he must; see in what attitude her slack limbs fell as they lifted her body up; see the precise folds of her sodden skirt. For he would have to describe each detail with selective accuracy. (p. 296)

Grace's imagined 'ending' recalls the final scene of Margiad Evans's *Country Dance* (1932) in which Ann Goodman is found drowned in a pool, allegedly at the hands of her English former lover after she has agreed to marry his Welsh rival. In a similar manner, Valentine's triumph would have been that of the man over the female body and of the colonial Englishman over the Welsh woman. Grace, however, decides not to kill herself. Finally taking control of her own destiny, she defies the male and the colonial plot and breaks out of their fictions. The suicide was to be the conclusion of Valentine's novel but

instead the Welsh woman determines that her story will continue past the conventional ending and she will secure a future of her own reckoning. Grace is found instead by the villagers who have gathered to prepare for the harvest festival and is symbolically received back into the Welsh community from which her extra-marital affair with the Englishman had distanced her. Like Nest, Grace finds the impetus to write again from her metaphorical return home. Unlike Nest, however, she successfully realises her literary aim. Significantly, instead of her death, the novel ends with Grace visiting a bookshop which is selling her first published work of fiction. The Welsh woman finally seizes control of her relationship with culture.

Both Nest and Grace find themselves swamped 'in a bog of acquired culture.' Their experiences show Vaughan exploring the implications of the influx of Anglo-American mass culture into Wales during the first half of the twentieth century. While it provided much entertainment for the population of Wales, it also brought many anxieties. Mass culture was an ambiguous presence in Wales that could lead to an anglicised population bred on Hollywood films, English popular fiction and English-language radio and forgetting the culture and the language of their own nation. They could also, however, benefit from mass education and affordable sources of culture now within reach and add this to their own culture and language, to become an enlightened and empowered populace. Mass culture could, and certainly did, prove a powerful anglicising force in Wales, akin to a cultural re-colonisation. While this is reflected in Vaughan's novels, they also explore the more subtle and complex ways in which Anglo-American mass and minority culture helped to shape Welsh culture in more positive ways and could be harnessed or, in some cases, subverted by the Welsh for their own purposes. The Welsh

female writer's relationship with Anglo-American culture is portrayed far more negatively in the earlier novel. In *The Curtain Rises*, Nest identifies the need to break away from the constraints of English culture but she dies before having the chance to write for the Welsh people. Whether the 'beautiful' (p. 468) play Nest envisions as she dies is the national play she has promised, we cannot know. Vaughan seems unable, from the midst of this period of cultural change, to portray a positive outcome to the Welsh encounter with English culture and does not allow her heroine to break free of its grasp. To see whether this is achieved we must look to the later novel, written with the advantage of distance and hindsight. The final scene of *The Candle and the Light* depicts Grace looking at her published book in a shop window. Significantly, it is a children's book. This could be read as a triumph of colonialism, with Welsh fiction dwarfed by the shadow of its colonial 'parent'. We must also take into account, however, that the children's book, full of stories influenced by the landscape and legends of the area, was written for Grace's granddaughter, Gaynor, who Peter tells his wife is '[w]onderfully like you' (p. 224). Viewed in this light, the children's novel represents Welsh fiction in English in its infancy. It has indeed survived the challenges presented by Anglo-American mass culture, and now, the guardianship of culture, and the collective memory of a nation is passed on to a new generation of the Welsh readers and writers of the future.



## Chapter Three

### **'Tin soldiers out of the same box': War and Welsh Identity in the Novels of Hilda Vaughan**

In 1917 in Newtown, the young Hilda Vaughan took her place in a procession of the Women's Land Army among girls carrying a banner that read 'ENGLAND MUST BE FED'.<sup>184</sup> As the recruiting officer, Vaughan delivered a speech to the young women of the Welsh town asking them to do their bit for the sake of their male counterparts in the British army:

I am putting before you the disadvantages of the life. Long hours! Hard work! Poor pay! After you get your board and lodge, a shilling a day perhaps. Very poor pay. But girls... The Royal Welch Fusiliers (the old Twenty-third) and the Welch Regiment are offering their lives for that. Will you not offer your services for that – for them?<sup>185</sup>

Vaughan had already served for two years of the First World War in a Red Cross hospital before assuming her duties as organising secretary of the Women's Land Army in Breconshire and Radnorshire. According to Christopher W. Newman, it was this active role that sparked Vaughan's writing career as 'her war-time duties brought her into contact with the realities of life on the farms', familiarising her with the experiences of rural, working-class women and providing material that is evident in much of her work

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<sup>184</sup> According to a letter written by the novelist Berta Ruck quoted in Deirdre Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows: A History of Women in Twentieth Century Wales* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 67. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>185</sup> Hilda Vaughan quoted in Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 67. Interestingly, this speech appears in almost exact replica, spoken by a recruiting officer for the Land Army in one of Berta Ruck's novels, *The Land Girl's Love Story*: 'I have put before you the disadvantages of this life. Long hours. Hard work. Poor pay. After you get your board and lodging a shilling a day, perhaps. Very poor pay. But girls, - our boys at the Front are offering their lives for just that. Won't you offer your services for that – and for them?' Berta Ruck, *The Land Girl's Love Story* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1919), p. 24. It seems that Vaughan was a character in a novel before she had written a book of her own. A letter from Ruck asking Vaughan's permission to include her in her writing is also quoted in the introduction to this thesis.

that was to follow.<sup>186</sup> The Boer War of 1899-1902 and the First and Second World Wars appear in five of her ten novels and the influence of Vaughan's experience of war can be felt in many of the others. *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* (1932) is set in the aftermath of the First World War as the English soldier, Dick, returns from the trenches to inherit an estate in Wales as a result of the death of two Welsh cousins. *Pardon and Peace* (1945) depicts another English soldier's return from the Great War to visit the setting of former happiness in Wales and culminates with his involvement in the Second World War. The Boer War is also mentioned here in the reminiscing of Squire Treowain, a character from the previous generation of soldiers. The novel is dedicated to Vaughan's American friends with whom she spent the years of the Second World War, along with her children, Shirley and Roger. *The Candle and the Light* (1954) uses war as a narrative structure, with the Boer War, First World War and the Second World War framing the events in a small Welsh market town. The three novels show the development in Vaughan's response to the war, from her personal involvement in World War One, her more distanced view of the Second World War and her more measured perspective and hindsight in the later novel. War exerts a powerful influence in these novels, raising issues that are epitomised in the experience of the author in the scene cited above as Vaughan addresses the women of Newtown. Her entreaty to the Welsh to aid the British war effort for the good of 'England' displays the destabilising effect of war on national identities. This is mirrored in Vaughan's novels and has powerful and lasting implications for Wales and Welshness in the texts.

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<sup>186</sup> Christopher W. Newman, *Hilda Vaughan* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1981), p. 3.

Mark Osbourne, the hero of *Pardon and Peace*, travels to Wales after the First World War to a place he had visited briefly as a youth in the hope of winning the hand of a woman he has seen there by the banks of a river. On learning that the woman, Flora Treowain, is married, he is not dissuaded from his task and embarks on a plan to seduce her while he paints her picture. When the picture is completed, and the sitter has returned his love, Mark takes the painting to Flora's home to be scrutinised by her father and husband. The verdict is that the painting 'flatters' Flora.<sup>187</sup> It is not a true likeness of her as she looks in the present but, according to her father, 'it has the look of her before that confounded war' (p. 105). It is not just five years that have changed Flora's appearance but something else. The Squire comments that the woman in the picture is '[t]oo young by a long chalk. Like her when she was a child. The look she had when she was happy' (p. 103). It is implied that the war has done something to alter Flora physically and emotionally. It appears as a mysterious influence that has an effect on identity.

The powerful ability that war had to alter and distort identity is repeatedly suggested in Vaughan's texts. The extent of this power is displayed as war destabilises the line between the living and the dead. Dick in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* appears as a doomed man from the very beginning of the novel. He inherits an estate after the death of his cousins and first surveys his new property while standing on a grave, 'an ancient old burial place'.<sup>188</sup> This sense of foreboding is increased as he meets his female relatives and is 'announced ... by the title of the dead' (p. 23). Similarly, Frances feels presentiment of Dick's demise and, while the party are preparing for otter hunting, she

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<sup>187</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *Pardon and Peace* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1945), p. 101. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

<sup>188</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1932), p. 13. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.



shudders as he tells her 'you needn't stay for the kill' (p. 238). At the end of the novel, the memorial plaque in the local church claims that Dick, 'having served throughout the Great War, died, in indirect consequence of that service' (p. 281). There is a sense that Dick has really been dead since the war or that his death has been determined since the beginning of the narrative and his return to Wales from active service. In a similar manner, the war seems to breach the boundary between the living and the dead in *Pardon and Peace*. In the novel we catch brief glimpses of the lives and deaths of Flora's brothers, David and Teddy (p. 47), and Mark's brother (p. 19) as if they are haunting the text. Meanwhile, Flora is depicted as one of the living dead owing to her dutiful existence, caring for the two crippled ex-servicemen, her father and husband. Connie describes her as 'so morbidly dutiful' (p. 63) living 'the deadly life she leads' (p. 124). It is a sentiment echoed by Mark, who tells Flora that he is waiting for her 'to come to life again' (p. 64). Indeed, the painting of Flora mentioned above is not like her because it is 'startlingly alive' (p.99). The living and the dead are intermixed as Flora is linked with characters killed in the war: '[i]n London, where they had grown up together, Mark walked with his brother's ghost, and the living Flora haunted him' (p. 107). Griffith, Flora's husband, is portrayed using similar language, as Mark demands that Flora leave her husband, declaring, '[c]an't you see he's already half dead' (p. 121). In fact, Mark's act of murdering Griffith is confused with the former's memories of the war. Before he has killed him, Mark imagines Griffith to be another man that he had killed in the trenches out of mercy (pp. 122-3). Like Dick, there is a sense that Griffith's death is part of the events of war, despite occurring years later. If the war can destabilise the line

between such straightforward identities as the living and the dead, it indicates the potential to wreak havoc on the more complex identities of gender and nationality.

War did, of course, alter the perception of female identity. The shortage of male labour during the First and Second World Wars resulted in women taking up what had hitherto been considered man's work. In March 1915 women between the ages of sixteen and sixty-five were called upon to register at labour exchanges and in March 1941 women between the ages of nineteen and forty-five were requested, once more, to fill the demand for workers.<sup>189</sup> According to Mari A. Williams, women's roles were even more deeply affected in Wales than elsewhere during the Second World War as 'the number of female workers in Wales increased by 134% between 1939 and 1945 (compared with an average increase of just 30% for the whole of Britain)'.<sup>190</sup> This is reflected in Vaughan's depiction of her Welsh heroines during war. Both Flora in *Pardon and Peace* and Grace in *The Candle and the Light* spend the First World War as Red Cross nurses. Vaughan portrays the hard work carried out by women as Grace 'volunteered for the roughest jobs' and 'pacified the grumbling Belgian refugees'.<sup>191</sup> Another prominent women's war role appears in this novel as we can also hear:

the shrill laughter and screams of munition workers – girls so different from the farm maid servants that tittered modestly behind their hands on a market day, that Maud declared, 'Mother would turn in her grave if she could hear the language these creatures use!' (p. 200)

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<sup>189</sup> See Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 58, p. 111.

<sup>190</sup> Mari A. Williams, 'Where *is* Mrs Jones Going?' *Women and the Second World War in South Wales* (Aberystwyth: Canolfan Uwchefrydiau Cymreig a Cheltaidd Prifysgol Cymru/University of Wales Centre for Advanced Welsh and Celtic Studies, 1995), p. 2.

<sup>191</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Candle and the Light*, (London: Macmillan & Co., 1954), p. 201. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

It is implied here that, even in rural Wales, their masculine duties and emancipation from home and hearth is changing female behaviour.<sup>192</sup> In *Pardon and Peace* there is a memorial to the traditional woman that has symbolic significance in the post-war society. It is discovered by Mark:

As he strolled amongst the graves ... he began to read the summary of a woman's life. "*A lady of singular gentleness and sweetness of disposition: wife of the above.*" That was a sufficient record of an unambitious woman, whose husband had "*sincerely mourned her loss*" and whose children had lived to "*hold her in revered and loving memory.*" (pp. 44-5)

Her grave marks the death knell of an outdated role for women in society after the First World War. When the youthful Connie in *Pardon and Peace* declares her intention to be independent as 'Men and girls are on an equal footing since the war', Mark asks sarcastically whether, '[n]ature changed her laws in 1918?' (p. 126). Although nature had not changed due to the war, society, in Wales and Britain as a whole, had at least begun to.

While Flora's Red Cross work was a relatively acceptable role for a well-to-do female, her vivid and horrific experiences of war, as recounted to Mark in *Pardon and Peace*, are almost on par with the terrors faced by her male compatriots. Though it was men who made the ultimate sacrifice, Flora describes the terrible things that she has also seen:

Train-loads of wounded pouring in, suffering. Sometimes horribly. Not enough beds for them all. Not enough nurses. You understand don't you, why I grew suddenly old – old in mind anyhow? Not wise. Not mature. Just old. Doing things

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<sup>192</sup> Although Vaughan's overall depiction of women's capable handling of war work is very positive, there are negative exceptions to this transformation in female identity. The First World War gives Gwenllian the opportunity to take charge of the estate as her brothers fight in France. After the war, Dick, a soldier returning from battle, inherits Plas Einon. Gwenllian is loath to relinquish the male role she has been given, so much so, that she ultimately contributes to his death in order to regain control over the estate. Her story is a monstrous embodiment of social fears that a generation of young women had taken over jobs that rightly belonged to the returning soldiers. See Beddoe, *Out of the Shadows*, p. 76.

for sick people. Material things. No time to think about anything beautiful or sane. It looked as though the war would last for ever. And I was always tired. (p. 47)

It is interesting that in Flora's account Vaughan, too, is appropriating a male role. Claire

M. Tylee has remarked that,

the incommunicability of the men's experience has been a constant theme of women's novels about the Great War ... one of the most important legacies of the popular memory of the Great War has been an emphasis on the separateness of the sexes.<sup>193</sup>

In depicting the graphic brutalities of war as a female experience as well, she dispels the widespread idea at this time that war was unspeakable and certainly not communicable to, or by, the female. Vaughan goes a little way, at least, in encroaching on what Tylee terms 'the forbidden zone' that was the domain of a male identity.<sup>194</sup> The sense of shared, rather than gendered experience of war, is strengthened as in *Pardon and Peace* there are some parallels in the description of maimed men on the battlefield and physical descriptions of women. In conversation with Flora, Mark describes 'the contortion of the dead after an attack. Some lay like smashed dolls on a nursery floor. Others dangled, limp as washing on a clothes line, over the barbed wire' (p. 73) His depiction of the brutality of war uses strangely feminine, domestic imagery here. The language used by Vaughan to depict war blurs the boundaries between genders. Curiously, women's bodies are also dismembered in the soldier's mind as he 'remember[ed] unremembered women – an odour, a limb – and a white angle of the face of the dead' (p. 5). This is not simply to suggest that women are also physically affected by the war but perhaps implies that the war has had a collective emotional and psychological effect on both genders. Vaughan's

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<sup>193</sup> Claire M. Tylee, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness: Images of Militarism and Womanhood in Women's Writings, 1914-64* (London: Macmillan, 1990), pp. 256-7. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid*, p. 257.

depiction of the war refuses to portray war as a purely masculine experience. This is in stark contrast with many other female narratives which emphasise the way in which the war is seen as something that they are not privy to, most notably perhaps, by Virginia Woolf in *Jacob's Room* (1922) in which the narrative does not have access to the protagonist's male experience of war. Perhaps Vaughan's gender-blurring depiction of war reflects the particularly destabilising effect it had on gender identity in Wales, as stated by Williams above, where, before the war, women were far less statistically likely to be employed outside the home than their English counterparts.

War is also shown to have a profound effect on masculine identity in the work of Hilda Vaughan. Paul Fussell describes how the First World War created 'a world of reinvigorated myth: ... a throwback way across the nineteenth and eighteenth centuries to Renaissance and medieval modes of thought and feeling ...'<sup>195</sup> The soldier fighting for king and country is steeped in the traditions of chivalry and is cast as a heroic figure in order morally to justify killing on behalf of the nation. The soldiers returning from war in Vaughan's novels, however, cannot live up to the role they are required to fulfil by war propaganda. Mark in *Pardon and Peace* informs Flora of the gap between the mythical ideal and the reality of the role of soldier:

He told her of the lad, shot through the stomach, who screamed for his mother;  
and of the fat sergeant who spun round top-wise, when his head was blown off.  
He cursed the dysentery, the lice, the mud, the cold; and the secret terror.  
“‘Heroes,’ the newspapers called us! A lot of poor bastards, under orders, their  
lives reduced to animal cowering and animal lust!’ (pp. 73-4)

Mark also illuminates the other side of the chivalric hero: the trained killer. He tells Flora that, 'Sometimes, even now, I don't give a damn for human decency or life. Then, I could

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<sup>195</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 115. All further references are to this edition.

wipe out any man who stands between me and what I want' (p. 74). Flora grasps the terrible legacy this could have for society as she muses 'I wonder ... All over the world, today, are there men who lust to kill, because something in themselves has been done to death?' (p. 74). It is a question that is played out in a contemporaneous work, Lewis Grassie Gibbon's *Sunset Song* (1932) as the returning soldier, formerly a gentle and tender person, brutalises his wife. In both these texts the chivalric myth hides the fact that a whole generation of young trained killers are suddenly reintroduced into society. War in Vaughan's novels causes a fracture in male identity, between the chivalric ideal and the hyper-masculine killer.

If the trained killer is the height of machismo, then Vaughan's novels also present the other end of the masculine spectrum. The prevailing view of the soldier in her novels is that of the crippled man returning from war. This is a motif found in many novels that follow the Great War. *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) notably portrays how the failure of a maimed masculinity to be reincorporated into society has tragic consequences. Injured soldiers also feature in Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover* (1928) and *The Return of the Soldier* (1918) by Rebecca West. Dick returns from battle weakened and vulnerable in Vaughan's *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*: 'The doctors said his heart was bad, well he'd take it easy now. Towards the end his nerve had gone ...' (p. 20). Mark is in a great deal of pain at regular intervals in *Pardon and Peace* due to shrapnel lodged in his leg. The war has literally left its mark on him, leaving an 'ugly scar' (p. 20) on his face. Similarly, in *Pardon and Peace*, Flora's husband, Griffith, lost a leg in the war and 'crept back a cripple, to the shelter of Flora's home' (p. 119). Masculinity becomes a split

identity, with war opening up multiple personas to the soldier, that of the hero, the killer and the cripple.

Having lost his leg, Griffith is completely dependent on his wife. With masculinity maimed and the status of women strengthened by their active role in the war, we see gender identities blurring even further in Vaughan's novels. This is most apparent in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*. Dick's weakened state due to the war seems to rob him of any form of masculinity. He is described by Frances as 'so undeveloped, so like a nice little pink fledgling, you can't call him a man' (p. 81). Not only is Dick not a man, he is portrayed as a woman in the text: 'his nose, straight and short, might have been called pretty in a girl, and his cheeks, stung by the wind, were a girlish pink ...' (p. 80). The novel sees Gwenllian, on the other hand, in the transition from female to male. When she tells Dick how she managed the estate single-handedly during the war, he replies that she 'ought to have been a boy' (p. 52). Dick is taken aback to see Gwenllian cry, '[s]he was brave and self-controlled. Her breaking down thus, melted him to pity because she was a woman; it shocked him also, as though she had been a man' (p. 96). The narrator informs us that within Gwenllian there is waged a 'long war between her unsatisfied woman's body and her dominating masculine spirit' (p. 230). Gwenllian marries Dick in order to stay on at Plas Einon, her ancestral home that has been entailed away on the male line to Dick. With her marriage to Dick, she seizes control of the estate once more, balancing its management with her parenting duties, doing 'a man's and woman's work as well' (p. 199). Finally when she has killed Dick to gain sole control of the estate, she looks up at the portrait of her father, 'for her the very splendour of manhood' (p. 41), and '[s]he feared him no longer; she had transcended him. Would you, a man, have dared as

much? she asked him silently' (p. 230). With the masculinised Welsh woman's conquering of the effeminate Englishman to win back her land, Vaughan offers us a very warped version of the ancient sovereignty myth in which power over the land is wrested back into the control of the Welsh. The sovereignty figure is a trope that harks back to the medieval romances of the *Mabinogion*. Glenys Goetinck has identified these romances as 'the remains of ancient sovereignty myth and dynastic legends' from the Old North.<sup>196</sup> Sovereignty is identified in the work of Goetinck as a woman, often a native princess, representing the land, who is married to a king symbolising 'his union with his kingdom'.<sup>197</sup> Gwen's marriage to Dick is a remarriage to the land and her killing of her husband is a re-conquering of the land, banishing colonial control. The blurring of gender roles caused by the war in Vaughan's novels makes identity malleable and destabilised. War breaks down the boundaries of identity, creating a fluid identity that can slip between hero and murderer, brave soldier and cripple, man and woman, and, as the counter-sovereignty myth in Vaughan's novel suggests, it has the potential to affect national boundaries as well.

This is realised in what is perhaps war's most disturbing distortion of identity in the novels. It occurs in *Pardon and Peace* as the aftermath of battle prompts a blurring between the identities of Mark and Griffith. On first encountering Griffith,

Mark found himself staring into the face of a man so like himself that he stopped dead, repressing an exclamation of dismay. The stranger suffered from his own infirmities. An injured leg was thrust out stiffly as he leaned forward in his chair. He grasped a stick in his right hand, and the fingers of his left were twitching at lips with a scarred twist. Their expression was bitterly familiar... He *is* me, Mark said to himself with a chill of horror. (p. 30)

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<sup>196</sup> Glenys Goetinck, *Peredur: A Study of Welsh Tradition in the Grail Legends* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975), p. 12. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*, p. 129.



This disconcerting sense of confusion continues throughout the text. Mark is preoccupied by the notion that Griffith has the life that was meant for him. He bitterly thinks about how 'Griffith will stare at his belongings, the wife he robbed me of, the child she bore him, the picture I painted' (p. 99). The two men become a strange hybridised creature. This is expressed in Mark's thoughts that Griffith is 'able to think with my brain, look with my eyes, to rob me of myself' (p. 102). It is significant that the Welsh Griffith and the English Mark have been made one person, sharing the same outlook, desires and thoughts, due to their involvement in the First World War. In Vaughan's text, war symbolically blurs the boundaries between the Welsh man and the English man, making national identity unstable as we saw in Vaughan's recruiting speech at the beginning of this chapter.

## II

The effect of the war on a sense of national identity is most apparent in *The Candle and the Light*. When the war against the Boers of South Africa is declared in the small market town it divides the community:

The professional class, to a man, and most of the wealthier trades-folk, were anglicized, members of the Church of England and Tories, like the neighbouring landed gentry. But the town's poorer classes and the farming community of the district spoke Welsh, were Nonconformist, Liberal and opposed to the war. The Army had always been to them little less abhorrent than Rome. (p. 76)

Identity in the Wales of Vaughan's novel suddenly becomes politicised with the outbreak of war, bringing with it a presupposed ideology and set of values. Instead of blurring the lines of identity, as we saw earlier, here, the war creates a strict divide. Despite the fact that this is a town in Wales inhabited by Welsh people, war allows no room for a specifically Welsh identity. Identity becomes polarised as the anglicised Welsh are now

labelled 'English patriot' (p. 77) while the Welsh-speakers who object to the war are branded 'Pro-Boer'. Amos Rhys, the editor of the local newspaper, writes anti-war editorials and is consequently labelled a 'Traitor,' with an anonymous attacker painting the word on his door (p. 97). Identity becomes limited and controlled within a series of labels, names and tags, reminiscent of the identity cards that the government required its citizens to carry during wartime. There are no allowances for shades of differing opinion, only for those who are allies and those who are enemies.

Consequently, war makes Welsh identity problematic in the texts. In *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*, Gwenllïan makes it clear where her loyalties lay during the war:

I managed to fight moss and plantains even during the war, when one felt it wasn't right to put men on a job like that. The true patriots around here ploughed up their tennis courts to grow potatoes; but I stuck at that. I did everything else we were supposed to do, but I wasn't going to have the beauty of Plâs Einon spoiled. (p. 95)

Gwenllïan's priority is her Welsh land, which she protects even at the expense of the British war effort. The Welsh heroine's love of her land is pathological and negatively presented in Vaughan's novel, resulting as it does in her committing the murder of her English husband. It is also important to note the difference between the identities of Gwenllïan and the 'true patriots' mentioned here. Although all are Welsh, Gwenllïan locates her identity first and foremost in her relationship with the Welsh land, whereas the others place the importance of their British identity before their identification with Wales. It is also interesting to note that the word 'patriot' is used here without qualification. Although they are Welsh land-owners we are supposed automatically to understand that during this time of war it is British patriotism that is meant and not the

Welsh nationalism that might be inferred during peacetime. Amos Rhys's response to the war is a more extreme nationalist stance in *The Candle and the Light*:

Amos Rhys, as was natural, ranged himself on the side of his own race, creed and political party. In the columns of *The Border Gazette* he thundered against the iniquity of making war in order to put money in the pockets of company promoters and empire snatchers whose morals were notoriously vile. (pp. 76-7)

Of course, Gwenllïan's and Amos' responses are to different wars, with the former reacting to the First World War and the latter the Boer War, and the two conflicts were subject to different influences and fought under different circumstances. In the texts, Amos Rhys's objection to the Boer war is not wholly condemned while Gwenllïan is a very negative character indeed. We can, however, identify a common theme in their responses to war. Vaughan portrays Welsh Nationalism or identification with Welshness that supersedes all other concerns as detrimental to the British war effort and even anti-war. Although large numbers of Welsh men, including Nationalists, such as Saunders Lewis, fought in the First World War, Vaughan's texts reflect the disillusionment felt by some Welsh nationalists (and others) in its aftermath. Plaid Cymru was established in 1925 partly due to the perceived injustices suffered by the Welsh during World War One. The nationalist party took a strong stance against Welsh involvement in the Second World War, objecting to the conscription of Welsh men in what they considered an English war (though, again, it must be noted that there were a great many Welsh men who were prepared to fight).<sup>198</sup> In Vaughan's novels we have seen the Welsh nationalist as a 'traitor' to Britishness and even an enemy, 'Pro-Boer'. There is a parallel here with

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<sup>198</sup> In the pamphlet 'Wales and the war according to Winston Churchill, Neville Chamberlain, D. Lloyd George and others' (Caernarfon: Nationalist Party Offices, undated) the party asserts that '[i]t is morally wrong for one nation to conscript members of another nation to fight its wars. The Government has not conscripted the Irish of Ulster (Northern-Ireland). Hitler did not conscript the Czechs to fight his war. Welshmen are conscripted.' p. 7. Though the pamphlet is undated, its language, written in the present tense, suggests that it was written during the Second World War.

attitudes in the Second World War as seen in Ursula Masson's study of conscientious objectors in Wales in which she states that 'Rhondda U[rb]an D[istrict] C[ouncil] voted against sacking [conscientious] objectors, and decided instead to investigate teachers with Fascist or Welsh Nationalist sympathies.'<sup>199</sup> Welsh Nationalism emerges in Vaughan's novels as a counter culture during wartime, allied with the enemy and a threat to the British war machine. It is represented during the Boer War by Amos Rhys who, though affectionately portrayed, is more than a little excessive. Significantly, his nationalism does not continue during the First World War, as we will see later. Instead, during the First World War, nationalism is represented by Gwenllian, a woman so obsessed with her land that she will commit murder; it is certainly not a stance that receives authorial approval.

While the Welsh Nationalist identity that detracts from the war effort is not fully endorsed by Vaughan, neither is an unquestioningly British patriotic outlook. This is especially the case in *The Candle and the Light*, as their involvement in the imperialist Boer War accentuates the faults of many characters. This is particularly true of the women, as Vaughan's novel undermines many of the patriotic female stereotypes associated with war. The novel reveals that the middle-class women who are 'doing their bit' for the brave soldiers are, in reality, gossip mongers. They gather to discuss who they will collectively shun next. One popular target is Amos Rhys, the newspaper editor. The narrative describes how 'ladies at work in the parish hall, making comforts for the troops, one and all decided to stop taking in *The Border Gazette*' (p. 76). Similarly, Grace Felin's mother is a rather pathetic creature who neglects her daughter in favour of her beloved

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<sup>199</sup> Ursula Masson, 'Loyalty and Dissent: Wartime Wales in 1940', *Radical Wales* 29 (Spring 1991), 16-19 (16).

sons. In her blinkered devotion, there are shades of the woman calling herself 'A Little Mother,' an infamous figure, who wrote a letter to the *Morning Post* in 1916 and was later lambasted by Robert Graves in *Goodbye To All That* (1929). It recounts her patriotic pride as she sent her son to war, gathered up his possessions and 'wrapped them all in a Union Jack'.<sup>200</sup> The futility of her mother's sacrifice is voiced by Grace, who muses, 'Poor mother ... she worships Robert. Now he's a trooper, just number something or other, in a troop-ship sailing for Table Bay' (p. 93). He dies shortly afterwards (p. 170). A very interesting description of Grace's friend, Lorna, in her sitting-room illustrates the ways in which women were bound up in war propaganda on many different levels:

Lorna had taken down the sepia reproductions of 'the world's masterpieces' from the white walls of her sitting-room. In their place she had hung photogravure portraits of Lord Roberts, Kitchener and Baden Powell. Her desk was spread with a map of South Africa. She was always jabbing it with paper flags on pins, and no longer, she said 'had a minute to spare for reading.' She read the war news, of course. Not to do so daily ... [she] considered a neglect of duty. (p. 123)

Not only is Lorna dutifully reading the propaganda in the 'war news' but she is also reminiscent of one of its potent images herself. She is a young patriotic British virgin in her symbolically white room surrounded by posters of war generals who are 'protecting' her. Tylee comments that propaganda in the First World War promoted the image of brave men fighting 'to save their Mother-country and their womenfolk from violation'.<sup>201</sup> Similarly, Sharon Ouditt remarks that the 'propaganda industry provided paintings, posters and postcards, many of which pictured images of England and loyal, waiting women'.<sup>202</sup> Vaughan transports this imagery to the preceding Boer War in this instance.

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<sup>200</sup> Anonymous letter published in the *Morning Post*, August 14<sup>th</sup>, 1916. Reproduced at <http://oucs.ox.ac.uk/ltg/projects/jtap/dce/varley/Mother.htm> (accessed on August 4th, 2008).

<sup>201</sup> Tylee, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness*, p. 252.

<sup>202</sup> Sharon Ouditt, *Fighting Forces, Writing Women: Identity and Ideology in the First World War* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 48.

While Lorna epitomises British patriotism, however, we must remember that she, and her ideologically inscribed sitting-room, are in Wales. This makes her act of putting pins in the map ambivalent. She is committing an act of imperialism by proxy but she, too, is a member of a colonised culture. Her renunciation of her usual reading habit shows how war has replaced culture with propaganda. The description juxtaposes imperialism and British patriotism with a loss of culture that serves as a subtle warning to Wales.

### III

Welsh identity is indeed threatened by the war in Vaughan's novels, reflecting wartime events. The Defence of the Realm Act 1914 awarded the state and the military exceptional powers that saw the government's increasing intervention in many aspects of the lives of their citizens. This manifests itself in Vaughan's texts as we see the unquestioning obedience of many characters to the state as a result of the war (though not all, as we have just seen). In *Pardon and Peace* the villagers attend a dance. As the evening draws to a close, we are told that, 'the orchestra crashed into "God Save the King," and Mark, like an automaton, stood to attention' (p. 36). He discusses his unquestioning reaction with his dance partner, Connie:

'I was thinking,' he said, staring past her, 'what odd things one does automatically.'  
'Standing so smartly to attention? Even *we* do nowadays.'  
'All the young women like tin soldiers. Toys out of the same box.'  
(p. 36)

A similar effect can be seen in Dick in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*, whose obedience to the state is displayed physically. He looks 'soldierly' (p. 80): 'He carried his head well, his shoulders were square and set back. He had evidently been drilled' (p. 80). There is a sense that the war has programmed the characters to behave in a certain way,

controlling what they do, say and believe. Although both men are English, in the first quotation we can see that Mark's automatic reaction is shared with Connie Thomas and the Welsh characters around them. The reference to the national anthem shows that this control is linked with British patriotism. As the London-based government controls the lives of its citizens, for those in Wales, it is a form of colonial rule.

Vaughan portrays the draconian power of the state during the First World War as a destructive force in Wales. As Dick pays his first call on his female cousins in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* he attempts to make polite conversation about 'the weather, the state of the roads' (p. 25). The widowed Mrs Einon-Thomas tells him that the roads 'are terribly cut up ... So much timber-hauling during the war, you know' (p. 25). She describes how the Welsh countryside has been exploited for the British war effort, with the valleys deforested for 'the supply of pit-props to the collieries of South Wales' (p. 26). The British fleet during World War One was powered almost solely by Welsh coal and Wales was mined and deforested to meet the huge demand. Gwenllian laments the effect this has had on the landscape: "It's ruined," she said. "There's almost nothing left" (p. 27). Gwenllian's comments lead Dick to wonder, '[w]as she thinking of men as well as of trees?' (p. 27). The destruction of the countryside is linked with the slaughter of Welsh men and it is suggested that Welsh life and landscape have both been sacrificed for the greater demand of the British state, a notion also explored in Welsh-language writing, for example, in Gwenallt's poem 'Rhydcymerau' (1951).<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> See Gwenallt, 'Rhydcymerau,' *Eples* (1951; Llandysul: Gwasg Gomer, 1978), pp. 20-21. In this poem Gwenallt describes a once inhabited area that has been covered by forestry commission trees: 'Ac erbyn hyn nid oes yna ond coed / ... Coed lle y bu cymdogaeth, / Fforest lle bu ffermydd, / ... Cyfarth cadnoid lle bu cri plant ac ŵyn. / Ac yn y tywyllwch yn ei chanol hi / Y mae ffau'r Minatawros Seisnig...' (p.21) [And by now nothing there remains but trees / ... trees where once were communities, / forests where once were farms, / ... the bark of foxes where once was heard the cry of children and lambs. / And in the darkness at its centre / The old Imperial Minotaur...']

The increased powers of the state not only meant that Welsh resources were overused. It also saw the seizure of 75,000 acres of Welsh land for military use by June 1940, while only 56,780 acres of English land was requisitioned for the same purpose.<sup>204</sup> Forty thousand of these acres were in the Epynt mountains in Breconshire and as a result two hundred and nineteen adults and children lost their homes. Significantly, this was a Welsh-speaking area and, as John Davies points out, '[a]s a result of the War Office's act, the boundary of Welsh speaking Wales was moved fifteen kilometres westwards.'<sup>205</sup> This action was a severe blow to Welsh culture and identity, as Iorwerth Peate's account of his conversation with an elderly woman whose house had been compulsorily purchased illustrates:

On realising that I was a Welshman – at least that is what I thought – the surliness receded, and the tears increased.

'My dear boy,' she said, 'go back there as soon as you can, it is the end of the world here.'

And although I knew that German bombs were falling on Glamorgan at the time, I knew she was right: It was the end of her world.<sup>206</sup>

It was the death knell to a certain way of life in that area of Wales. The farming inhabitants of the Epynt mountains appear in *Pardon and Peace* as Mark and Flora take an excursion to the mountains as a release from the constraints that make them so unhappy in the village below. The mountains and farmland are described as a utopia: 'The green solitude was unscarred as earth before man drove his first plough' (p. 82). The inhabitants are equally idealised, with the farmer, Mr Rhys, described by Mark as a 'contented human being' (p. 83). Their happy and simple existence is most poignant as

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<sup>204</sup> Plaid Cymru, *Wales and the War*, p. 8.

<sup>205</sup> John Davies, *A History of Wales* (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 603. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>206</sup> Iorwerth Peate quoted by Herbert Hughes in *An Uprooted Community: A History of Epynt* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1998), p. 111.



the novel was published in 1945, five years after the inhabitants of Epynt were banished from their homes. The Rhys family and their untouched surroundings serve as the unconscious of Vaughan's novel. Their presences represent, as Pierre Macherey writes, 'the unconscious which is history, the play of history beyond its edges, encroaching on those edges: this is why it is possible to trace the path which leads from the haunted work to that which haunts it.'<sup>207</sup> Moreover, the Epynt Mountains are juxtaposed with the Boer war in Vaughan's text. Lying on his deathbed, Squire Treowain desires to take a last look at Moel Epynt:

'Reminds me of the Transvaal, the bold shape of Moel Epynt does ... Fine open country. Good to ride over. Brown. Sun-scorched. But reminded me of home. At the end of a rare hot summer, you know, when the grass is confounded slippery. Often thought of it when we were burning their farms ... Most distasteful business I was ever engaged upon.' His one good eye gazed wistfully at the darkening window. 'Isolated farms, they were. Like ours. I lie here looking at Moel Epynt, and that tidy little chap, Jones Brynwern's place. If it weren't for the storm you'd see it, yonder. And I think of us Yeomanry riding up to homesteads remarkably similar.' He repeated the word 'homesteads,' and frowned ... A Bible-reading community they were. Couldn't be helped. But driving women out of their homes; burning 'em down in front of their eyes, the place they'd borne their children in – I never could square it with my conscience. Didn't seem right to me ... they were *farming* folk. They loved the land...' (p. 149)

The landscape of Wales is compared with that of South Africa and there is a strong sense of Welsh identification with the Boers. In Vaughan's text there are startling parallels between the scorched earth tactics used by the British against the Boers and the Welsh being driven from their homes on Epynt that seem more than just coincidental. It is implied in Vaughan's text that the Welsh are victims of an imperial war in the same way that the Boers were sacrificed to the British Empire. War locates the English government in opposition to Wales, as an influence that destroys Welsh identity.

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<sup>207</sup> Pierre Macherey, *A Theory of Literary Production*, trans. Geoffrey Wall (1966; London: Routledge, 1978), p. 94.

Wales is at the disposal of the English militia in Vaughan's texts and is presented as a retreat for English soldiers after the horrors of the First World War. In *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* the Welsh landscape represents safety to Dick:

he drew a long breath. The air was newly washed by rain. It held the saltiness of the sea, and the sweetness of rising sap. The pungency of wet leaf mould and moss was in it, rank woodland scents, stealing up from the dingle below and blending with the tonic breeze that swept the hilltops. Cool, he thought, clean, restful, safe! He shut his eyes and smiled. *Safe*, he repeated to himself and then – *home*. He was poignantly happy. He wanted to cry. (pp.18-19)

Paul Fussell has observed that war's 'symbolic status is that of the ultimate anti-pastoral' and as a result the English soldiers revered the myth of the English pastoral idyll.<sup>208</sup> This ideal is transported to Wales in Vaughan's texts. Katie Gramich has remarked that Wales appears in *Pardon and Peace* to heal the injured English soldier's wounds.<sup>209</sup> The name of the village Mark visits, 'Bryn-Tawel', connotes tranquillity and serenity that is in stark contrast to the horrors of war. It is, therefore, no surprise that Mark 'had come to be made whole again' (p. 4) in the small Welsh village. Coupled with the 'tonic breeze' enjoyed by Dick, Wales appears as a *Mabinogion*-style cauldron of rebirth in which soldiers are repaired and reborn. This use of the Welsh countryside is to the detriment of the Welsh people, however. Dick gains his safe haven at the expense of his Welsh cousins, 'the inheritance of two other soldiers now dead' (p. 19) and Mark's arrival at Bryn-Tawel is met with Welsh 'reluctance, hostile to the prying of a foreigner' (p. 4). Bryn-Tawel is also to become home to evacuees, as Nanny tells Mark: 'there'll be children in a week or two. From Liverpool and Newport, they'll be coming. Homeless, the poor mites. I'll be helping care for them. They'll be safe here whatever' (pp. 186-7). The anglicising threat

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<sup>208</sup> Fussell, *The Great War*, p. 231.

<sup>209</sup> Katie Gramich, 'Welsh Women Writers and War in the Twentieth Century', *Wales at War: Critical Essays on Literature and Art*, ed. Tony Curtis (Bridgend: Seren, 2007), pp. 122-141 (p. 129).

of such an influx was a source of consternation to Plaid Cymru, who complained that the policy was, 'Without any consideration for the Welfare of the Welsh nation, its language culture and health'.<sup>210</sup> In a similar manner, the English soldiers' therapeutic use of the Welsh countryside is an act of colonial appropriation, though it is not one of which Vaughan seems overtly to disapprove.

Welsh woman is part of this act of appropriation. Flora is linked with her surroundings, as Griffith expresses to Mark: 'She had been an incarnation of the valley's freshness, Griffith tried to say. To think of bright water and dew glistening in the grass, of the wild birds and the soft wind, was to remember her when she was a child ...' (p. 118). She shares the healing properties of the land for Mark: '[s]he didn't know it, but she was going to be his wife, to make up to him, as no one else could do, for all he had suffered' (pp. 16-17). Welshwoman, Flora, is part of the spoils of war for Mark, the English soldier returned from battle. The complication, however, is that she is already rather unhappily married. She has already been given to her Welsh husband, Griffith, as a reward for his war-service, since, as Flora explains, her father said, "[h]e'd better come to us." I knew what that meant' (p. 48). Flora is an emblem of Welsh sovereignty; she is, 'like the silver with our crest on it' (p. 47). To bring about the British nation, the union between the Englishman and the Welshwoman, Mark must first murder the Welsh husband. Vaughan's novel displays how, in order to unite the British identity during the war, in various ways Welsh identity must be forfeited.

#### IV

Claire M. Tylee has remarked that the literature of the First World War reveals that, 'the middle-class saw an international war with "the Boche" as a blessed escape from the

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<sup>210</sup> Plaid Cymru, *Wales and the War*, p. 8.

class war at home' and that 'war over-rode all other social and political considerations, reducing them to their true relative insignificance'.<sup>211</sup> While the First World War was viewed as dwarfing the issues of socialism and suffragism, it also had a similar effect on Welsh identity. War in Vaughan's novels eliminates differences between British citizens. For Dick, in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*, war is an equaliser. As a poor soldier, he is bullied by his financially solvent superiors. Their mockery, however, comes to an abrupt end with the outbreak of war: 'since 1914, nothing had mattered as much as thirst and lice and the terror of being proved a coward – forms of misery which, because they were shared by officers who had despised him, had affected him less deeply than a lack of cash' (p. 20). The war in *The Candle and the Light* puts a temporary stop to local gossip:

The eleventh of October – the day upon which the Boers marched into Natal. And later, when the appalling news of Black Week reached the sleepy little town, its stunned inhabitants had something heavier to discuss than whether or not Mrs. Peter Felin had allowed a young man to kiss her in Abbey Woods. (p. 75)

War, its ideology and propaganda transfer the identity of the 'other' from conflicting social groups within society to the Boers or Germans, now the outside 'other'. Amos Rhys has pledged his opposition to the impending First World War in *The Candle and the Light*. As war is declared, however, he 'had to eat his words' (p. 196). The chapel-going Welsh nationalist, 'Amos Rhys, the intolerant Dissenter' (p. 199) enters the church to pray: 'his eyes revealed such deep, impersonal grief,' showing that he is 'a man burdened with the whole world's sorrow' (p. 198). Having renounced his nationalism, Amos transcends his Welsh identity for the common good and the text approves his noble act.

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<sup>211</sup> Tylee, *The Great War and Women's Consciousness*, p. 130, p. 133.

Welsh identity is transformed by the war in Vaughan's novels. This change is observed by Grace and her daughter in *The Candle and the Light*:

In the winter of 1914 the town had begun to grow loud with the shouts of command and the stamp of heavily booted feet at drill. When Alice came home from school for her Easter holidays, and Grace went with her for country walks, she heard young Welshmen's voices echo along startled valleys. Sometimes the troops in training marched to their own mournful hymns, more often, later on, to Irish and Scottish songs – 'Tipperary,' 'The Bonny, Bonny Banks of Loch Lomond,' or to some music hall catch, jaunty as the chirp of London sparrows, that helped to quicken their pace on the last weary mile into camp. (p. 200)

We see the Welshmen's slow transition into Britishness in their singing. War diminishes Welsh identity to reassert a unified British identity. As we can see from the soldier's songs, the move is from Welshness, Irishness and Scottishness to a London-associated British identity.

Such an identity is realised in *Pardon and Peace* as the Second World War brings citizens together, working towards a common cause and against a common enemy. As London is devastated in the blitz, Mark, now an air-raid warden, attempts to save a mother and child from a bombed building. The Englishman works alongside a Welshman with, 'blue scars on [his] pallid face [which] proved the owner to have been a coal miner' (p. 190). As they work side by side in this very British war the Welshman vents his anger at the common enemy: 'These stinking Germans! The bloody shame it is, the things they're doing...' (p. 193). It is in war-torn London that Mark and Flora are finally reunited, symbolising the unified identity of Britain. Mark expresses the belief that this war will have a different effect on Britain from the preceding conflicts:

If it doesn't hate itself. If when it's suffered, it doesn't shut all the windows and scream with self-pity and whine for someone to look after it. In other words, if it isn't the kind of bitter fool I was after the last war ... And I don't think it will be. People don't talk the same way. We were always blaming our parents' generation

for what had happened to us ... Nowadays people don't. Certainly the young don't. (p. 202)

There is a sense in Vaughan's work that from the Boer War to the Second World War Britain is set on a journey towards greater unification. The Boer War is portrayed as a war of imperialism in *The Candle and the Light* and *Pardon and Peace*, the First World War shows greater unification while it lasts but leaves unresolved national tensions, while unification is finally achieved in the Second World War in *Pardon and Peace*. As Mark and Flora talk of what the future holds for their United Kingdom, Vaughan endorses the unified British identity with a message of hope:

'The war. Shall we win it?'

'In the end.'

'We?' she said. 'England? The Commonwealth? America, at long last? Is that what you mean?'

'We – yes. And humanity through us.' (p. 202)

The unified British nation triumphs in Vaughan's work, but it adopts the terminology of English imperialism. Welsh identity has been destroyed to make way for a British identity that is distinctly anglicised in Vaughan's texts.

From the early stages of Vaughan's portrayal of conflict it is suggested that war, with its obvious ability to change power relationships between countries and shift the borders of nations, creates a struggle for control in which national identities can be redefined. Vaughan champions the unification of Britain epitomised in the reunion of Mark and Flora during World War Two in *Pardon and Peace*. It is pitted against an alternative outcome for national identity after war in the disturbing counter-sovereignty myth of *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* in which Welsh identity prevails. Here, World War One allows the Welsh woman to conquer the battle-weary English male, infecting the countryside with negative meaning. The Welsh land becomes 'a place of burial' (p.

287) from which Frances, Gwenllian's sister, must flee forever to the safety of England. Vaughan's portrayal of war is located ideologically in a centre position between that of two very different Welsh female writers, Kate Roberts and Berta Ruck. The former portrays Welsh nationalist and socialist responses to the First World War in *Traed Mewn Cyffion* (1936) while the latter advocates an unquestioning British patriotism in texts such as *Khaki and Kisses* (1915) and *The Land Girl's Love Story* (1919). Vaughan's depiction of the war is not unsympathetic towards Welsh nationalism, as we have seen in her explanation of the stance of the Welsh-speaking inhabitants in *The Candle and the Light* during the Boer War. Although Gwenllian is a negatively portrayed character, the nationalist, Amos Rhys, is kind and loveable, if a somewhat clownish figure. Nor is Vaughan supportive of the unquestioning English/British patriotism of the well-to-do women in *The Candle and the Light*. Their war knitting parties to make comforts for soldiers are presented as a hypocritical excuse to gather and gossip and cast judgement on their fellow townsfolk. Perhaps Vaughan's response to the war in her novels is best characterised towards the end of *The Candle and the Light*. With news of the end of World War One, the inhabitants of the town attend the Church:

Today sectarian differences were set aside, the great church, half empty as a rule, was packed with Dissenters and with people who never entered any place of worship... They sang the National Anthem and the organ thundered 'Land of Hope and Glory' while they trooped out of the Abbey. (p. 203)

The community is united and difference is eliminated, or at least temporarily forgotten. They congregate to sing the British national anthem and as they leave the Anglican Church to the sound of 'Land of Hope and Glory', we are left to wonder to which 'land' the song refers. This unified 'Britishness' prompted by the two world wars exerts an extremely powerful influence in Vaughan's construction of identity in her novels. It

covers tensions, however, that resurface in Vaughan's work. Despite the conciliatory British identity advocated in the texts, there is also sensitivity to the sacrifice of Welsh identity that this incurs. It is a loss that Vaughan's texts frequently return to as the question of identification and relationship with Wales and Welshness is constantly renegotiated, as we will see in the chapters that follow.



## Chapter Four

### **‘Wouldn’t my sisters say I was shocking?’ Spinsters, Lesbians, Heroines and the New Woman in the Novels of Hilda Vaughan**

A letter from Charles Morgan to his wife, Hilda Vaughan, written in July 1933 voices concern that she is writing about a female character ‘feministically’. He urges, ‘Try to see her as a man would; that will give you the irony; and your own self will temper man’s too harsh justice with mercy.’<sup>212</sup> Her reply has been destroyed, so for her own ideas about feminism we must look elsewhere. Vaughan’s life and career spanned a period when the opportunities available to women were increasing. Coinciding as they did with the First World War, her first few years of adulthood were spent in the Women’s Land Army, directly involved with work that began to change the way in which women’s roles were perceived. Her first novel was published seven years after partial suffrage was awarded to women and three years before it was awarded in full. Nicola Humble remarks that in the feminine middlebrow novel of this period, ‘Hero and heroine roles are fundamentally transformed, while shifts in attitude to motherhood and marriage lead to an obsessive questioning about trajectories of women’s lives’.<sup>213</sup> This chapter will examine Vaughan’s response to the emerging female roles and stereotypes of the spinster, the lesbian, the ‘New Woman’, the modern girl, the mother and the heroine in four of her novels: *The Battle to the Weak* (1925), *The Invader* (1928), *The Curtain Rises* (1935) and *Pardon and Peace* (1945). It will attempt to discover whether Vaughan heeded her husband’s advice;

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<sup>212</sup> Letter from Charles Morgan to Hilda Vaughan, addressed from Campden Hill Square on Saturday, 29th July, 1933. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan. The female character here is referred to as an ‘actress’ and seems to have been an early incarnation of Nest Owen in *The Curtain Rises* who in that novel becomes a playwright.

<sup>213</sup> Nicola Humble, *The Feminine Middlebrow Novel 1920s to 1950s: Class, Domesticity, and Bohemianism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 198. All further references are to this edition.

we will see whether her work embraced emancipation or reinforced anti-feminist stereotypes.

## I

Although the spinster was not a new phenomenon, of course, she became a prominent and fiercely contested figure from the fin-de-siècle and during the years between the wars.<sup>214</sup> The death of a large proportion of the male population in the First World War left a generation of women without husbands. These 'surplus' women of 1920s Britain were a media fixation, as Maroula Joannou comments, 'Speculation on the future prospects of the two million became a national pastime... and "spinster" became a pejorative term'.<sup>215</sup> The spinster is a recurring character in Vaughan's novels and different types of spinster meet with varying levels of animosity. There are some 'good' spinsters, such as the elderly Mary Cottage in *The Invader*, who is hardworking and uncomplaining, and described by Monica as 'one of the saints of God'.<sup>216</sup> Similarly, Charity Evans in *Pardon and Peace* is a straightforward and practical woman who delivers words of wisdom and can be relied on 'to speak the honest truth'.<sup>217</sup> The majority of spinsters in Vaughan's novels, however, are almost entirely negative characters. Lily and Martha Bevan, the meddling spinster sisters in *The Battle to the Weak* are deeply unpleasant:

Martha Bevan... and Lily were alike gaunt and tall, though [Lily's] face was uniformly pale as parchment, and [Martha's] mottled ... by a network of veins.

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<sup>214</sup> See Maroula Joannou, *Ladies Please Don't Smash These Windows: Women's Writing, Feminist Consciousness and Social Change* (Oxford: Berg, 1995), pp. 77-8. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>215</sup> Joannou, *Ladies Please Don't Smash these windows*, p. 78.

<sup>216</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Invader* (London: William Heinemann, 1928), p. 299. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

<sup>217</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *Pardon and Peace* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1945), p. 22. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

They were both clad in the black cloth of respectability, and each grasped an umbrella.<sup>218</sup>

Their almost cartoonish appearance is expanded upon in other texts in which the spinster is depicted as a figure of fun. Miss Lloyd in *Pardon and Peace* serves solely as a source of amusement to Mark Osbourne:

as he was introduced to Miss Lloyd, Mark's face wore a secret smile. It diverted him to see her long upper lip uncover tombstone teeth as he admired her antique furniture and musty library ... What a subject... for a caricature in the brutal style of Rowlandson, the poor and ugly old maid with her social pretensions... (p. 16)

She is a throwaway comic figure who does not appear in the novel again. Miss Webster is also 'generally derided' (p.46) by most of the other characters in *The Invader*. She is 'a joke among the younger generation of women agriculturalists who she lectured on dairy farming' (p. 46). The spinster, it seems, does not meet with authorial approval in Vaughan's novels. She is a caricature that seems to come straight from the illustrations of *Punch*.

While Vaughan's portrayal of the spinster is reminiscent of the light-hearted mockery of unmarried women in the media, her novels also echo some of the more scare-mongering claims in the contemporary press. A headline in the *Daily Mail* in 1921 claimed that, 'The superfluous women are a disaster to the human race'.<sup>219</sup> Vaughan's depiction of Lily Bevan seems to support the view that the single woman is a threat to natural order as her sour spinsterhood is linked with sexual repression and frigidity that prevent her 'natural' urge to perpetuate the race:

She herself had been pale and ailing as a girl. The laughter and romping of her fellows had been a cause of distress. From any merrymaking she had shrunk

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<sup>218</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Battle to the Weak* (New York and London: Harper Brothers, 1925), p. 84. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

<sup>219</sup> Headline in the *Daily Mail*, 1921 (exact date is not quoted) quoted by Virginia Nicholson, *Singled Out: How Two Million Women Survived Without Men after the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 23.

instinctively, conscious that her combined shyness and lack of good looks would prevent her ever being a favourite. Vague longings and unrests had oppressed her, but what she could not attain she had taught herself to despise, and as the years went by she had reversed the order in which religion and misanthropy had come upon her and now regarded both gaiety and love-making as things primarily displeasing to her God and herself. When she met a pair of lovers strolling arm-in-arm, she told herself that 'gals as was courtin' too free was comin' to no good.' A wedding was a source of discomfort to her, unless there was reason to suppose, as she frequently hinted, that it had been hastened by necessity. Sex was, to her, a thing unclean, and since she knew that in this matter the feeling of the simple, healthy-minded community in which she lived was not with her, she was forced to seek for instances in which its manifestations were forbidden, in order to have popular opinion on her side. No scandalous rumour escaped her, and there was no harmless piece of gossip relating to a neighbour's courtship to which she did not try to give a discreditable turn. (pp. 141-2)

Lily's frigidity is seen a sort of mental illness, at odds with the 'healthy-minded community' and she spreads her rumours like a disease. The sexual repression of the spinster also manifests itself physically in the bodies of Vaughan's unmarried female characters. The Bevan sisters, as we have already seen, are 'gaunt', Martha has a 'flat breast' (p. 117) and Miss Webster is 'narrow of chest' (p.242), tellingly lacking the breasts that would signify childrearing and reproduction. The spinster is a deformed version of a woman, whose deficiency in womanly flesh reflects her lack of fleshly desire and her failure to procreate. It is further highlighted when we look at the more benign spinsters in Vaughan's work. Charity Evans' spinsterhood is neutralised by the fact that she is physically indistinguishable from a married woman. Mark Osbourne notes that:

Her smile had suggested a happy union and her figure maternity. As though she read his thought, she shook her head. "Nor I've never had no family. Not o' my own, you might say. But I've reared a good few, too. Other folks' they were. (p. 22)

Similarly, Mary Cottage is identified with a pseudo-maternal role. Her home is decorated with 'relics that Mary's love held precious – framed Sunday school certificates and shiny photographs of her many nephews and nieces' (p. 298). While the favourable spinsters

look after children, however, the Bevan sisters keep Megan's illegitimate child from its 'sinful' mother. She laments that '[t]hey 'ouldn't let me see her more nor onst a year when I did get a few days' holiday... and then they was sayin' things to me in front o' her to poison the poor child's mind against me. And now I shan't be seein her at all... They've forbidden me the house' (pp. 210-211). Though Lily and Martha look after children, theirs is a twisted version of motherhood as they keep the children away from their loving mother. They are anti-maternal figures and, like all Vaughan's unpleasant spinsters, are the opposite of what the healthy woman 'ought' to be.

The negative portrayal of spinsterhood in Vaughan's novels, however, inadvertently serves to highlight the plight of the unmarried woman. In *The Battle to the Weak*, Esther's single status renders her dependent. Following the death of her parents, Esther lives with her younger brother, but when he marries she is passed on to her brutish elder brother. The latter believes that she is beholden to him. He reminds her, 'I've acted uncommon generous by you, takin' you back' (pp. 199-200). The spinster must relinquish any control over her own destiny and her status is determined solely by her relationship with men. When the local parson shows a romantic interest in Esther, her brother begins to refer to her as 'my dear'; 'She had never heard him address her thus before; the prospect of a creditable marriage makes a difference, she reflected, to the way in which her relations treat a woman' (p. 199). Esther's story reveals a great deal about Vaughan's attitude towards the spinster. She becomes engaged to Rhys at the age of eighteen but the match is disapproved of by both families. Rhys goes to Canada to make his fortune so that they can marry but fails to wait for her as she spends years nursing various sick relatives. Esther is a spinster for a lengthy period and is only finally reunited

with Rhys in her late thirties, in the final pages of the novel. Before meeting him, Esther has vowed to remain unmarried, telling her Aunt Polly that she and her sister 'do allus mean to keep single, as long as we do live, and to stay together' (p. 31). The possible fate of the two sisters is perhaps prefigured in the description we have seen of their aunts, Lily and Martha Bevan. It is a later a cause of alarm for Esther:

she saw herself with a flash of imaginative terror that her grief made possible, as a parched and shrivelled hag, the contempt of those who would support her declining years, who yet secretly guarded a little hoard of memories which would then be all the surviving riches of her emptying soul. (p. 276)

Faced with her future of dependency, a maligned and malignant member of the community, Esther's final reunion with Rhys can be read as Vaughan's fantasy of the spinster who escapes what is seldom depicted as anything other than a terrible fate.

The texts are even less forgiving of spinsters who are also 'New Women'.

Although the New Woman wasn't necessarily unmarried, the stereotype propagated by the conservative press linked her with spinsterhood. Sally Ledger has remarked upon a series of articles written by anti-feminist writer Eliza Lynn Linton in which the New Woman, or 'Wild Woman' as Linton calls her, is 'a creature who opposed marriage, who vociferously demanded political rights, and who sought "absolute personal independence coupled with a supreme power over men."'”<sup>220</sup> Miss Webster is a teacher in a college for women in *The Invader*. She inherits a farm in Wales upon the death of her uncle and decides to farm it herself, turning out the tenant, Daniel Evans. She literally and symbolically takes power that had belonged to men. In fact, Miss Webster believes she can do better than a man, declaring, 'I shall not require any local bailiff to teach me

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<sup>220</sup> Eliza Lynn Linton, 'The Wild Women as Social Insurgents', *Nineteenth Century* 30 (1981), p. 596 quoted by Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 12. All further references are to this edition.

farming. On the contrary it seems to me the men here need themselves to be taught. They are sadly out of date so far as I have observed their methods' (p. 57). To Miss Webster, men are 'the enemy sex' (p. 57) but her New Woman costume and manner replicate the masculine. While she is herding her new flock of sheep, the men 'talked in undertones and glanced askance at her short skirt and masculine gaiters; but she was not aware of their disapproval or derision' (p. 114). It is suggested here too, that the spinster has links with suffragism as we are told that 'Miss Webster had matured in the days when the feminist movement still existed and had need of symbols' (p. 46). The novel is largely dismissive of her feminism. Just as Lily Bevan suppresses her desire, Miss Webster's feminism is also portrayed as a way of suppressing her 'true' nature. When a large number of Miss Webster's sheep die in deep snow, the narrative informs us that, 'Her feminine instinct urged her to fly to a man for advice, but her principles forbade her' (p. 128). Indeed, Miss Webster's feminism is a performance that cannot always be kept up: 'She was tired to-night – tired of fighting, of feminism, of the combative rule of life she had imposed upon herself' (p. 255). It is interesting to look at Miss Webster alongside the similar figure of an 'upstart' female farmer portrayed by novelists whose work was frequently compared with Vaughan's.<sup>221</sup> Bathsheba Everdene in Hardy's *Far From the Madding Crowd* (1874) finally makes a success of her enterprise even if she does have to give up her single status and a little of her pride. In a later novel, *Joanna Godden* (1921),

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<sup>221</sup> For example, a review in *West Sussex Gazette*, April 1<sup>st</sup>, 1925 reads: "'The Battle to the Weak' is a love story of Esther Bevan, a Welsh woman, who for beauty of character is comparable to the great peasant heroines of Thomas Hardy. The setting too is 'Far From the Madding Crowd' in the depths of the Welsh countryside.' The *Devon News*, 24<sup>th</sup> August, 1930 claimed that Nell Tretower in *Her Father's House* was 'a woman who suffers greatly, like Hardy's Tess...' Charles Morgan prefigured reviews which suggested a link between the work of his wife-to-be and that of Sheila Kaye-Smith. In a letter dated January 26<sup>th</sup>, 1923 he writes, 'Sheila K.-S. has your repose more than any other living woman; but even she, though she has a greater variety and fluency than I have yet seen in you, hasn't, I think, the spiritual depth which will appear before all the world in your writing when you've gathered a few tricks.' Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

Sheila Kaye-Smith, a direct contemporary of Vaughan, portrays a spirited single-female farmer who becomes the richest and most successful in the parish. With Miss Webster being gleefully run out of the neighbourhood by the close of Vaughan's novel, it is evident that both Hardy and Kaye-Smith portray female farmers far more sympathetically than their Welsh counterpart.

There have been Welsh women who might be described as 'New Women' (though they might not have appreciated the label). 'Cranogwen' (Sarah Jane Rees) was a lecturer, writer and the first female editor of a Welsh periodical *Y Gymraes* and later *Frythones*, a magazine that she founded herself in 1879.<sup>222</sup> She was also a spinster, as was another notable Welsh female figure, Eluned Morgan. Morgan was a daughter of 'Y Wladfa' (the Welsh colony in Patagonia) and returned to Wales to publish books and articles that she promoted in her lecture tours. The cover photograph of the 2001 edition of her books, *Dringo'r Andes & Gwymon y Môr*, shows Morgan clad in the straight skirt and masculine shirt of the New Woman.<sup>223</sup> In Hilda Vaughan's novels, however, the New Woman is firmly established as a uniquely English cultural import. She is reminiscent of the spinster in Bertha Thomas' *Picture Tales of the Welsh Hills* (1913); one of the 'spinsters of spirit' who has the 'cycling fever' and has travelled 'three hundred miles from... London... for the treat of free roving among strangers in a strange land'.<sup>224</sup> Thomas' New Woman narrator is more likeable, but like Miss Webster she is an outsider. The latter is continually referred to as a 'foreigner' (p. 200) and a 'stranger' (p. 201) and

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<sup>222</sup> See Ceridwen Lloyd Morgan, 'From Temperance to Suffrage?', *Our Mother's Land: Chapters in Welsh Women's History 1830-1939*, ed. Angela V. John (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1991), pp. 135-158 (p. 138). All further references are to this edition.

<sup>223</sup> Eluned Morgan, *Dringo'r Andes & Gwymon y Môr*, ed. Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan and Kathryn Hughes (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2001).

<sup>224</sup> Bertha Thomas, *Picture Tales of the Welsh Hills* (Chicago: F. G. Browne & Co.; London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1913) p. 9.



her usurpation of Daniel Evans leads to the view of her as a colonist, described as ‘this invading English woman’ (p. 71). There is a strong sense that the New Woman doesn’t belong in Wales in Vaughan’s work. Daniel tells Monica that:

if she [Miss Webster] was a widow with children, the district ‘ould think a deal better of her. But an old maid with means has no call to turn a working farmer out o’ his home. She did ought to live quiet and tidy in one of these cathedral cities I hear tell of, where old maids do mostly get together. (p. 212)

When Miss Webster is driven out of Wales by her scheming neighbours she returns to her natural environment ‘to teach young ladies farming in some new college’ (p. 333). Daniel Evans loses his enmity towards her, ‘wishing her joy and new prosperity since she no longer threatened their own’ (p. 333). The feminist spinster is acceptable now that she is far from rural Wales.

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It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that Vaughan safely relegates her only lesbian character to London. The lesbian was a close relative of the spinster in contemporary social stereotype and the increase in ‘superfluous’ women was often cited as the cause of lesbianism. A. P. Herbert in the infamous trial for the censure of the lesbian novel *The Well of Loneliness* (1928) by Radcliffe Hall, remarked that ‘it is not “natural” to have 2,000,000 more women than men, and “this sort of thing” was bound to arise from the state of affairs’.<sup>225</sup> One of the first to theorise about lesbians in Britain was Havelock Ellis. In his book, *Sexual Inversion* (1897), he characterises the lesbian thus:

The modern movement of emancipation... must be regarded as on the whole a wholesome and inevitable movement. But it carries with it certain disadvantages... we can scarcely be surprised to find an increase in homosexuality which has always been regarded as belonging to the allied, if not the same group of phenomena ... the congenital anomaly occurs with special

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<sup>225</sup> A. P. Herbert quoted by Ledger, *The New Woman*, p. 102.

frequency in women of high intelligence who, voluntarily or involuntarily influence others.<sup>226</sup>

Havelock Ellis' lesbian finds her way into Vaughan's novel, *The Curtain Rises*. We are first introduced to Ruth Fremlyn, a middle-aged lesbian, by Julian Ore, who describes her to a friend: '[y]ou know, Ruth Fremlyn, that friend of Kate Stratton's. You must have seen her. She's always about The Miniature Theatre with our Kate. One of her spinster field marshals... Takes a mighty interest in unrecognised talent – especially if it's feminine, and youthful...'<sup>227</sup> Ruth is indeed an intelligent woman who promotes feminine learning. She takes the heroine, Nest, under her wing, moving her into her house to teach her about culture.

Lesbian characters began to feature in many novels of the early and mid twentieth century such as Virginia Woolf's *Orlando* (1928), *The Hotel* (1927) by Elizabeth Bowen and Rosamund Lehmann's *Dusty Answer* (1927). Perhaps tellingly, Vaughan's depiction of the relationship between Ruth Fremlyn and Nest Owen is similar to that between Olive Chancellor and Verena Tarrant in an earlier novel, *The Bostonians* (1886) by Henry James. Fremlyn, it is implied, is a predatory lesbian who preys on the unsuspecting Nest. In a scene in which Fremlyn commands Nest to sing, the elder woman appropriates the traditional male gaze in a disconcerting manner:

Nest was standing by the window, and the sun burnished her black hair with blue, like the lights upon a crow's wing. A flush of embarrassment had given colour to her cheeks. Her large eyes, full of mysterious thoughts, gazed straight at Miss Fremlyn without seeing her. As she sang, her full white throat rippled with movement, and her girlish breasts were visible beneath her thin blouse with every breath she took. (p. 183)

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<sup>226</sup> Havelock Ellis quoted by Ledger in *The New Woman*, p. 130.

<sup>227</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Curtain Rises* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935), p. 173. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the chapter.

Nest is presented in a highly sexualized way and the imbalance of power suggested by the word 'girlish' implies Nest's exploitation by Fremlyn. Significantly, Nest is completely unaware of the nature of Miss Fremlyn's regard, as she 'gazed straight at Miss Fremlyn without seeing her'. This also removes her from any involvement, or culpability, in the pseudo-lesbian relationship.

Like Havelock Ellis' lesbian and the spinster, Fremlyn is linked with the feminist movement. It is a connection that Marie Stopes also makes in *Enduring Passion* (1928) as she states that 'Lesbian love ... is so much practised nowadays, particularly by the 'independent' type of woman ...'<sup>228</sup> As Ruth informs Nest, her mother was a suffragette:

My mother was a great-hearted woman. She lived for others. She was one of the first to devote herself to the cause of Woman's Suffrage. It brought a most unhappy division in our home ... She lived long enough to see women attain the vote. It was the happiest moment of her life. D'you know what her last words were to me? ... 'Ruth,' she said, 'there's still more for you to do...' Wasn't that inspiring? (pp. 179-180)

In Vaughan's novel the Suffragette has literally given birth to the lesbian and passes on to her the mantle of feminism. Ruth's feminism, like her sexuality, is not endorsed by the text. It becomes a source of comedy as the Welsh Nest does not engage with the Women's movement in the desired manner. In a letter to Julian she writes:

We are reading now *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* because I ought to know the feminist movement from the start. I find it dull; but Mary Wollstonecraft, who wrote it, you know, when her lover left her, threw herself into the Thames, which is exciting, but Miss Fremlyn says it was weakness. She was pulled out and married. This was against her principles. (pp. 199-200)

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<sup>228</sup> Stopes, *Enduring Passion* (1928) in *Marie Stopes*, vol II, p. 41.

Nest's naïve account of the origins of feminism allows the text to undermine the women's movement, presenting it, and Miss Fremlyn, as a joke that reveals the conservative slant of Vaughan's narrative. As we saw earlier, the feminist has no place in Wales in Vaughan's novels. Nest's dismissal of feminism also suggests that feminism has no relevance for the exiled Welsh woman either.

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Nest's rejection of militant suffragism is also characteristic of the new generation of women in the novels. Following on from the New Woman, the modern girl shares the desire for freedom but differs from her predecessor in her relationship with feminism.

This is made explicit in *The Invader* as Miss Webster is compared with her pupils:

Though Miss Webster sedulously played the man, she remained every inch the spinster. Her square skirt, which seemed to have been cut from cardboard rather than cloth, her petersham waistbelt and her starched collar had been a joke among the younger generation of agriculturists, to whom she lectured on dairy farming; for most of them like Monica herself were content to remain feminine in their smocks and breeches. They had grown up in an England that poured flattery on every woman who did, or tried to do, a man's work and they saw nothing incompatible in earning a living, exercising a vote and being beloved. In them, the defiance of feminism was dead because it was unnecessary. But Miss Webster had marched in days when the feminist movement still existed and had need of symbols. (p. 46)

The political apathy of the new generation of young woman is lamented by Ruth

Fremlyn:

‘I'm saddened – sorely saddened! – by the selfish indifference I encounter in our own sex. Think,’ she cried, addressing Nest as though from a platform, ‘think of the opportunities we have for bettering the world! If only we stood united! But young women to-day seem to be more absorbed by their own petty love affairs.’ Her small thin face, the colour of parchment and netted with tiny wrinkles of fatigue and anxiety, expressed a vivid contempt. (p. 180)

The modern girl enjoys many of the freedoms won by the New Woman but does not share her fierce feminism in Vaughan's novels. The description of Ruth Fremlyn delivering her tirade 'as though from a platform' suggest that the older generation is considered extremist, and the unpleasant description of her that follows undermines the authority of her viewpoint, implying that perhaps the younger generation are not so contemptible after all in their 'petty' concerns. In this aspect, at least, the text seems to be supportive of this newer female figure.

While the New Woman in Vaughan's work is usually English, the modern girl is associated with the towns and cities of both England and Wales. This can be seen on a smaller scale in *The Invader*, where market day at Aberithon, the local market town, mixes the townswomen with the women of rural Wales. Here we see how, 'Women dressed in the decent black of Nonconformity and carrying baskets laden with butter and eggs, were jostled by the gaily hatted, silk-stockinged girls of the town' (p. 137). The sobriety of the rural women is in contrast with the flamboyant, modern town-girls. In *The Invader*, Mary Anne's mother attempts to dissuade Daniel Evans from marrying her daughter, saying that she will 'do well for one o' this generation. They're all for pleasure. I never saw nothing like it, nor the immodest way the gels dress themselves up! A town life would just suit Mary Anne – flighty, that's what she is' (p. 144). When Esther visits a shop in the market town in *The Battle to the Weak*, she 'shrank from the critical glance of the young woman in black satin who leant over the counter, her white hands and polished pink finger-nails displayed upon it' (p. 258). That there is something disconcerting about the modern girl is suggested by the word, 'displayed'. Similarly, in *Pardon and Peace* Connie is described by Charity Evans as 'bold as brass, the flounce-about!' (p. 24). She

leads a 'gay life in Cardiff' (p. 27) as an art student before moving to London. When Mark suggests that she might move to Paris, however, she replies that, 'That'd be going a bit far, wouldn't it?' (p. 36). Her reaction hints at a tone of mockery as Vaughan suggests that the boldness and independence associated with the town girl may, in reality, operate within rather tame limits.

Of course the modern girl is associated with everything current and up-to-date.

Fay Sinclair in *The Invader* is a visitor from London who stays with Miss Webster and Monica. Disrupting the rural routine of Monica's work in the dairy farm,

she carried Monica back to the drawing-room because she 'simply *must*' play her the latest tune from the latest musical comedy. She made the decorous cottage piano, which had belonged to Miss Webster's mother, with its pleated silk and its muffled tone, rock to the new nigger syncopation; and, when she tired of that also, she must needs teach Monica the 'twinkle' and all the little runs and dips and hesitations that were the dancing of the period. (p. 252)

Not only is Fay aware of all the latest fashions but she also seems to flit from one thing to next. Connie, in *Pardon and Peace*, is also connected with dancing. We meet her for the first time at a village dance where she is described as 'a girl in a frothy dress' (p. 24).

This implies an insubstantial nebulosity that characterises the modern girl in Vaughan's novels. When Mark asks Flora if she has seen a painting while it is being created she replies, 'Only the sort of water-colour Connie Thomas does ... I knew that wasn't very serious' (p. 45). To Mark, Connie is but a passing fancy who 'only commanded his attention when her hot little body was in his arms' (p. 29). There is nothing solid, substantial or serious about the modern girl; like the fads she follows, she is temporary, transient and vapid. Vaughan's modern girl doesn't often take sex very seriously either. When Mark dances with Connie he muses, 'They were agreeable to hold, these young women of the new style who felt as if they wore no clothes' (p. 26). There is

a hint of promiscuity about the modern girl, which Mark implies is general. This ranges from Connie who is 'so blatant yet so innocent a coquette' (p. 125) to Fay Sinclair who represents the dissolute excesses of the modern girl. Monica is horrified when she realises the true character of Mrs. Sinclair:

Now she saw in her only a woman who claimed the status of a wife while enjoying the freedom of a courtesan, who sneered at constancy and motherhood alike, because she was greedy and a coward. 'It is you,' she thought, 'whether you are in a drawing-room or beneath a street lamp, who cry out always: 'Give me more! Work or swindle or sweat others – but give me more!' (p. 270)

While the comparison between Fay Sinclair and a prostitute is extreme, the possibility of sexual adventure is never far from the modern girl in Vaughan's novels. Flora is persuaded by Mark into an extra-marital affair in *Pardon and Peace* but it is significant that Vaughan shows the consequences of this are murder, as Mark kills Flora's husband (p. 177) and is imprisoned (p. 179), while Flora goes mad and is institutionalised (p. 187). It is clear that, however lightly the modern girl perceives sex, this attitude is not sanctioned by the text. Nest in *The Curtain Rises* is propositioned by the Jewish patron of the arts, Saul Alcazan. His overtures show that sex was something that was expected of her:

'If you're afraid of me trying to make you marry me,' he said, laying his hand on her arm, 'you needn't worry. I'm not, unhappily, in a position to do so. My love for you is in no way a threat to your cherished independence. We are both free people with our own jobs to do. But we could help each other. And add – very much, my darling! – to each other's happiness. What harm could there be in that?' His voice went on low and persuasive. 'Surely nowadays, everyone recognises the right of all human beings to joy and health and sanity? There would be no consequences and no-body need ever know.' (p. 315)

The prevalence of the sexual adventure in the novels of the period was something to which some, like Katherine Mansfield objected. Writing to Lady Ottoline Morel about her enjoyment of Austen's *Emma*, Mansfield remarks that, 'It's such a comfort to escape

from the modern novels I have been forcibly reading. Wretched affairs! This fascinated pursuit of the sex adventure is beyond words boring! I am bored by sex *qua* sex, by the gay dog sniffing around the prostitute's bedroom...'<sup>229</sup> This view is echoed in Nest's words to Saul Alcazan: 'Don't you think... if one's indicated – as tactfully as possible that there are certain respects in which one's old fashioned – odd, if you like – it's better not to keep on circling round a rather embarrassing topic?' (p. 313). Rather than a form of liberation, Vaughan portrays sex as another tiresome convention to which women are expected to conform.

In fact, just being a modern girl is an act of conformity rather than rebellion, according to Vaughan. All modern girls are frequently referred to as exactly the same in the novels. When Julian takes Nest out for dinner he remarks, '[l]ook at all the girls in this company – every blessed one of 'em. You can't tell them apart. Like painted pebbles on a painted beach' (p. 144). Mark considers 'All the young women, like tin soldiers. Toys out of the same box' (p. 36) at the village dance in *Pardon and Peace*. Uniformity in dress and behaviour is implicit in forming the collective identity of the modern girl. When Mark first meets Connie we are told that, 'He had flirted with her kind over the counter of army canteens and in the wards of Red cross hospitals: a familiar type, wearing cap and apron, khaki uniform or the breeches and smock of the Land Army. Plucky, enterprising, good-natured, he liked her well enough' (p. 25). Although he has only just met her, the modern woman is a type so conventional that Mark instantly forms his opinion of her. The implications of becoming a modern girl are displayed as Nest goes to the hairdresser's in order to attain the modern style only to lament, 'I've lost

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<sup>229</sup> Katherine Mansfield quoted by Nicola Beauman, *A Very Great Profession, The Woman's Novel 1914-39* (London: Virago, 1983), p. 123. All further references are to this edition.



something of myself' (p. 136). The hairdresser tells her that she 'had to have it shingled and permed some time... Everybody's doing it. Makes you look so old-fashioned if you don't.' (p. 136). In becoming a modern girl, Nest loses her identity and becomes the same as all the others.

While Nest cuts her hair in order to look the part, the modern girl is also most frequently characterised by her use of make up and cosmetics. This can be seen in the description of Fay Sinclair: '[h]ow brilliantly artificial she was – the trim ripple of her hair, the pink gloss on her fingernails, the discreet suggestion of scent that came from her!' (p. 247). The text is damning of Fay's bedroom full of creams and make-up, brushes and perfume, which it deems 'the equipments of artificiality and waste' (p. 258). The made-up modern girl is also made up – she is a pretence. Make-up alters and changes the features of the actress, Bianca, in *The Curtain Rises*: 'Though her small mouth was smiling, the carmine lipstick gave it a hard curve' (p. 119). The lipstick transforms her smile into something less appealing. In fact, the modern girl is often linked with the actress, as seen in *The Battle to the Weak*. Mrs. Pritchard, Rhys's aunt, declares, 'I don't know what's comin' to the gals these days. They are gone that flighty! Short skirts and silk stockin's. The very same as play actresses...' (p. 66). Fay's behaviour is linked to the stage: 'While there was a man left who would clap her performance, she would play on. Her husband was a faithful playgoer, but she was tired of his applause...' (pp. 247-8). There is a sense that make-up is a mask that is worn by the modern girl as she plays a role. This is reminiscent of Jean Rhys' construction of the young woman through make-up and costume in her novels of the 1920s and '30s, in which the image of the marionette is often evoked to represent the modern girl. The alternative title of her novel *Quartet*

(1929) was *Postures*, suggesting the performance of a role. In a similar manner, Vaughan shows that the modern girl is a falsity that conceals the true individual.

This is taken to its extreme as Connie loses her identity altogether in *Pardon and Peace*. She embodies all things modern to Mark. On an evening out in London he tells her, '[y]ou remind me of an advertisement for something... A seaside resort poster. People waiting for their train at the tube station turn to look at it. "That'd be a nice holiday," I can see them thinking' (p. 127). She is linked with the markers of progress, modernity and increased leisure in society. When Mark is on a train he thinks about how 'Connie had come and gone, like the pink little villa he had just noticed and had lost sight of already' (p. 138). The villa represents middle class comfort and suburbia that were features of modern life. When she visits his flat, Mark tells Connie: '[s]omeone ought to paint you like that. "Study of a Modern Girl." The equal footing, but very feminine, still' (p. 126). Representative of a whole group of women, she loses her individuality. The novel turns her into a symbol like all the things with which she is compared. A contemporary reviewer of *Pardon and Peace* complained that they 'found Connie a little too much in the stereotyped tradition to be convincing.'<sup>230</sup> Vaughan's emphasis upon Connie's adherence to type, however, is so sustained as to present a conscious indictment of the loss of individuality experienced in conforming to the traits of the bold and brash modern girl.

We occasionally catch a glimpse of the real Connie, however, behind the symbol. The modern girl is associated with gaiety and fun in Vaughan's novels, which is indeed conveyed as Connie wears 'a flag-day smile' (p. 25), is continually exclaiming 'What fun

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<sup>230</sup> *Oxford Mail*, July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1945.

it's going to be' (p. 125), wants to move to London for 'better fun' (p. 25). Her repetition hints at an element of pathos, however, as if she is trying to convince herself that she really is having fun. When Mark mentions the village dance where they met, her reaction is telling: "It was fun," she repeated. He was not sure, and hoped he was mistaken, but he fancied that he had seen tears in her eyes' (p. 130). There is a sense that there is a real person inside the symbolic girl who is sometimes glimpsed just for a split second. The gaiety of the modern girl is also an act performed by Fay Sinclair:

Mrs. Sinclair had not the courage of tragedy, and, if she looked squarely at herself, it was a tragic face that looked back at her. Light comedy, then, she would play, and she could not play it without applause. She was afraid of silences and what they contained for her. If no one laughed at what she said, admired what she wore, was enchanted by everything she pretended to be, her pretence failed.  
(p. 247)

Ultimately, Vaughan's modern girl is a tragic figure. Behind the front and the falsity she reveals women who are unhappy in yet another unsatisfactory new guise.

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Connie, the modern girl, declares that 'family life's awful. I shall never marry (p. 124). As we have seen, her position is shared by Vaughan's anti-maternal spinsters and childless lesbians. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that the family and especially the role of the mother are surrounded by anxiety in Vaughan's novels. Her work engages with contemporary concerns as childcare manuals began to appear in great numbers in the early and mid twentieth century, giving women detailed instruction on how they should raise their children. In America in 1928, John Watson became a prominent theorist as he advised parents to refrain from 'mawkish and sentimental' treatment of their child:

Let your behaviour always be objective and kindly firm. Never hug and kiss them, never let them sit in your lap. If you must, kiss them once on the forehead, when they say goodnight. Shake hands with them in the morning.<sup>231</sup>

In Britain, Frederick Truby King's popular childcare manual gave strict timetables for bathing, feeding and play. Marie Stopes added to the debate when her book *Radiant Motherhood* was published in 1920. Even Hilda Vaughan's parenting advice was sought and appeared in a 1933 article in *The New Era*. It is interesting to note, though, that she thought there was too much emphasis on the 'theory of motherhood':

We can't, unfortunately, have big families nowadays,... but failing a large family, I think that every mother should have an interest outside her domestic round. The mother whose attention is entirely concentrated on one child is probably one of the greatest psychological dangers the child can have. Single-eyed devotion puts everything out of focus. That does not mean, of course, that you should not love your children. A child needs a very great deal of affection, but it should not be perpetually in the limelight of attention. The over-anxious and worried mother who has no occupation, not much to do at home and not enough children, fusses, worries, panics and spoils. It's very easy to be over-anxious. I know what difficulties one can make for oneself. When I had my first baby, I meticulously read up all the most modern theories, I put myself in the clutches of several specialists and I employed a series of theoretical nurses. That baby's upbringing was governed by the letter of the law, and looking back, I can see now that I lost sight of the spirit. A child can't have too much love, at all times, or too great care when it is ill; but it can be made cross and delicate by too many good intentions. Too many regulations, too much theory, make a harassed and unhappy mother, and, in consequence, a harassed and unhappy child.<sup>232</sup>

Vaughan's view seeps into her novels in which the figure of the mother plays a very interesting and significant part.

The novelist's assertion that the mother can be a 'psychological danger' to her child was a prevalent view in many childcare manuals of the period. As Diane Richardson has observed, mothers 'were now held responsible not only for the physical

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<sup>231</sup> John Watson quoted by Diane Richardson in *Women, Motherhood and Childrearing* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 33. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>232</sup> Hilda Vaughan quoted in *The New Era*, April 1933.

and moral welfare of their children, but also for their psychological development'.<sup>233</sup>

Vaughan states that,

If a baby is continuously panicked in its first year of life, it will be very difficult to make up to it afterwards for the calm and natural happiness missed in those important months when it is assailed by its first and most lasting impressions.<sup>234</sup>

Her words recall a scene in *The Battle to the Weak* in which Esther's behaviour as a baby is affected by her harsh surroundings:

for the greater part of her time she lay unheeded ... She had already begun to distinguish the sounds of pain and anger, and her mother's exclamation of distress awoke a dim response in her ... She tried to struggle out of her cradle, a new and exciting accomplishment, but she was wound in a thick shawl and could not extricate herself. Her impulse was to cry; but as that seldom brought her attention or relief, she lay still, whimpering slightly, and fighting with fat little pink hands to free herself from bondage. (p. 9)

Esther's self-sufficiency and her lack of tears are perhaps the early signs of her strength and independence that we will see later in the chapter. The implications of the mother and child relationship in adulthood are also displayed in *The Curtain Rises*. Julian's relationship with his mother was extremely close but she had died while he was relatively young. Julian tells a friend that '[t]here's no relationship quite so good' (p. 195) as that between him and his mother. This is used to account for his rakish behaviour throughout the novel as Julian has many failed relationships with women, none of whom, it is implied, can replace his mother. His relationship with Nest replays some of the oedipal yearning that Julian feels for his mother. He tells Nest that he was unfaithful to her 'like a son, Nest, not like a lover!' (p. 450). Nest describes her estrangement from him as turning him '[o]ut of your nursery' (p. 451). While her novels appear to borrow from Freudian

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<sup>233</sup> Richardson, *Women, Motherhood and Childrearing*, p. 37.

<sup>234</sup> Hilda Vaughan quoted in *The New Era*, April 1933.

theory, Vaughan writes about her own relationship with her mother in psychoanalytical terms. In an extract from her unpublished autobiography, Vaughan writes that

I was brought up in the aftermath of Victorian propriety; and what I might now confide to a psychoanalyst about my mother's "case" I should to this day shrink from printing for general circulation. ... But in her later life her mind became increasingly disordered; and it is not possible to describe our home without any reference to the stress and pain she caused within it. As I sit nervously biting my pen, a habit she induced with her constant interruptions, I am puzzled how to write of our ... [words missing] or the emotional resentment of a sufferer from her tyranny. I think she never again felt any strong, abiding emotion, except that of possessive jealousy, which attached itself chiefly to her eldest child.<sup>235</sup>

Though it would be simplistic to attribute the many unsatisfactory maternal relationships in her novels solely to her personal experience, Vaughan herself admits that she played out her negative view of her mother in her work. She explains that she took an account of her mother's youth and 'turned the story into a play, "She, Too, Was Young". It was produced on the London stage in the costumes worn during her teens ... But I allowed the heroine of my comedy ... to "live happily ever after".<sup>236</sup>

This personal experience may, in part, account for the preoccupation with bad mothers, who appear in almost all of her novels. As a child Vaughan was intrigued by the case of Mary Morgan who was hanged in Presteigne, for killing her child, in 1805. In her autobiographical essay, 'A Country Childhood' Vaughan writes, '[s]he was condemned for murdering her baby. I wonder why she did it. It seems such an odd thing to do. "All mothers love their children."' <sup>237</sup> This is certainly not the case in the texts. We have already seen the monstrous mother, Gwenllian, in chapter one of this thesis, but mothers who either fail to love their children or to offer them suitable care or affection recur in

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<sup>235</sup> Hilda Vaughan, extract from an unpublished and unfinished autobiography by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>236</sup> From Vaughan's unpublished autobiographical writings.

<sup>237</sup> Hilda Vaughan, 'A Country Childhood', *The Radnorshire Society Transactions*, (1982) 9-18 (14).

Vaughan's novels with curious frequency. In *Pardon and Peace*, Flora has had a child with a man she does not love and her lack of fondness for the father seems to extend to the child. When Mark asks her if she loves her son, Flora's answer is unconvincing: "I can't tell." Then she added quickly, "Of course I do. Yes of course... (p. 49). Daniel Evans' mother in *The Invader* loves only Daniel from her extensive brood. As she informs us '[w]ith all my other children it is as if once I'd given them birth they'd gone clear away from me. But he is remaining part o' me as though the cord had never been cut' (p. 106). Annie Bevan in *The Battle to the Weak* finds motherhood another tiresome domestic chore. She puts Esther, her 'bundle', down:

she put it in the wicker cradle beside the hearth. She was glad to have disposed of it, for the next baby, to whom she must give birth in three months' time, demanded the whole of the slight stock of her vitality ... she was disappointed and shocked at finding so little pleasure in motherhood. 'I do wish as I were not havin' another so soon,' she sighed... 'I don't seem to take no delight in Esther now, like what I did when she were first born ... (p. 8)

A biographical explanation of this prevalent image in Vaughan's work is not wholly sufficient, however. Many novels of this era depict deficient mothers, including Ivy Compton-Burnett's *Parents and Children* (1941), E. Arnot Robertson's *Ordinary Families* (1933) and *The Pursuit of Love* (1945) by Nancy Mitford. Vaughan's incapable mothers engage not just with her own life but with a literary and cultural trend of the early and mid twentieth century.

This is acknowledged by Nicola Beauman, who has identified what she calls 'devouring mothers' in many examples of the fiction of this period. She describes devouring mothers as women who,

having themselves been deprived of an independence by society, have chosen, consciously or unconsciously, to pass this deprivation on to their daughters ... some have battered on to their children for pleasure and self-aggrandisement;

while others have clung to their daughters out of selfishness and fear, usually disguised as invalidism, loneliness or general helplessness. The deformities imposed by society on women's lives have too often been passed from mother to daughter.<sup>238</sup>

The 'devouring mother' prevents her daughter from marrying, thus forcing her into a life of spinsterhood, according to Beaman.<sup>239</sup> In *The Invader*, Mrs. Evans, apparently suffering from the '[s]ingle-eyed devotion [that] puts everything out of focus' described by Vaughan in the article in *The New Era*, tells her son that 'so long as there is life in my body, so long I'll see to my son's wants, and none other shall do it beside me' (p. 29). Her jealous adoration of her youngest son has left her adamant that he shall not be allowed to marry while she is alive. It is a source of consternation to her son, Daniel:

[w]hatever he did was well done in her sight, save only if it related to another woman. On this subject alone he dared not open his mind to his mother, and, though he often blamed her selfishness, it was a selfishness that flattered him. 'Poor old 'oman,' he thought. 'I do wish she wasn't so stubborn set against my marriage.' But he was pleased by her importunate adoration as by the jealous faithfulness of a dog. (p. 29)

Interestingly, this relationship emasculates Daniel, positioning him as a 'spinster' figure.

Similarly, in *The Battle to the Weak*, Annie Bevan also tries to hinder her eldest daughter's marriage by hiding the suitor's letters:

Esther looked down at her, bowed by the burden of her resignation without the courage either of rebellion or endurance, tearful in self-pity, weak and afraid. It was she who had stolen and destroyed Rhys's letters. She had confessed as much when taxed with it. Esther had been hotly angry when she thought of what those precious letters meant to herself, and of the disaster their disappearance might have caused. (p. 140)<sup>240</sup>

Mrs. Bevan begs Esther to stay at home and nurse her until her death. Esther yields to her pleas and while she dutifully stays at home, Rhys marries someone else and Esther is left

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<sup>238</sup> Beaman, *A Very Great Profession*, p. 51.

<sup>239</sup> Beaman, *A Very Great Profession*, p. 53.

<sup>240</sup> This replicates a feature of the plot of Vaughan's play *She, Too, Was Young* which was in turn based on real events in her mother's youth.



a spinster. During Annie Bevan's plea, the true nature of Esther's relationship with her mother is displayed: '[r]esentment mingled with her pity as she noticed that Mrs. Bevan's outstretched hands were clutching at her like a greedy child' (p. 191). The roles of mother and daughter are reversed. The fragility and the instability of the role of the mother are revealed, reflecting the anxieties surrounding motherhood in society at that time. The mother's inability to live up to traditional notions of the feminine ideal places her alongside the other negative female figures in Vaughan's narratives. Vaughan seems to oppose the contemporary woman's new-found prerogative to choose a life that is different from that prescribed by the patriarchal society. In presenting soured spinsters, predatory lesbians, fast modern girls and incapable mothers, Hilda Vaughan reinforces the anti-feminist stereotypes and anxieties of a society that was threatened by the new freedoms opening up for women.

## II

Such a view changes, however, when we explore her portrayal of working-class, rural Welsh women in *The Battle to the Weak*. Although Annie Bevan is an inadequate mother, the text also draws attention to the harsh social conditions for women which have fostered such a figure:

[i]ncessant drudgery, poor health, poorer spirits, and overmuch child-bearing had reduced Annie Bevan to a wraith so colourless and thin that it seemed strange she should not be transparent as a pane of glass. Her once abundant yellow hair had turned to the nameless shade of dust. She had lost nearly all her teeth, and her shrunken mouth intensified the peevishness of her expression. (pp. 75-6)

The effect of too many pregnancies and toil on Mrs. Bevan's health is reminiscent of the accounts written by women in their letters to the Women's Co-operative Guild, published in 1915. These often harrowing letters detailed the drudgery, illnesses and birth-

complications that were commonplace in the lives of poorer women and were published in a bid to publicise the need for better maternal and infant care for the working classes. Like Mrs. Bevan the writer of one letter declares, 'I am a ruined woman through having children.'<sup>241</sup> Another letter states that,

no amount of State help can help the suffering of mothers until men are taught many things in regard to the right use of the organs of reproduction, and until he realises that the wife's body belongs to herself, and until the marriage relation takes a higher sense of morality and bare justice.<sup>242</sup>

John Bevan is a tyrannical husband who beats his wife and children. Esther tells Rhys that 'he'll go on the drink for days after and be abusin' o' us at home somethin' cruel' (p. 51). As Annie's frequent pregnancies suggest, John Bevan is the sort of brutish husband that was abhorred by Marie Stopes. In *Radiant Motherhood* (1920) she warns that:

there are still among us a distressing proportion of ignorant, coarse and consequently ruthless men who are not debarred from becoming husbands. Such men have been in the past in the habit of 'using their wives' regardless of the desires or even the actual health requirements of the unfortunate women who are tied to them ...<sup>243</sup>

Annie Bevan tells Esther that 'tis when he's in a good temper I do fear him most o' all. He's comin' close to me and catchin' holt o' me, and I not able to get away from him, not havin' strength for the struggle even – not darin' to neither' (p. 189). In this novel, Vaughan highlights the plight of the working-class woman whose circumstances rob her of health, happiness and any control over her own body.

In *A Very Great Profession*, Beauman asks,

why did no one portray, in fiction, the kind of lives described by Margery Spring Rice in *Working-Class Wives, Their Health and Conditions* (1939)? Might not *Round About a Pound a Week* (1913) by Maud Pember Reeves have had more

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<sup>241</sup> *Maternity: Letters From Working Women Collected by The Women's Co-operative Guild*, ed. Margaret Llewelyn Davies (1915; London: Virago, 1978), p. 29. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>242</sup> *Maternity*, pp. 27-8.

<sup>243</sup> Marie Stopes, *Radiant Motherhood* (1920) in *Marie Stopes*, vol I, pp. 99-100.

impact if presented to the public as a novel? The answers are clear: for fiction to be believable it demands first-hand knowledge and involvement from the writer...<sup>244</sup>

I would argue that Vaughan goes some way towards doing just this in *The Battle to the Weak*. The physical hardship of women's lives pervades the text, which contains lengthy descriptions of the work carried out by the female characters in the home and on the farm in a manner reminiscent of Kate Roberts' stories of the 1920s and 1930s. It is emphasised in a scene in which the heavily-pregnant Mrs. Bevan toils in the home while her husband blithely rides to market:

Annie Bevan had started a dozen of her tasks and finished none. Already she was exhausted, though the long summer's day lay before her. She dragged herself into the kitchen, and noticing the fire had gone out and would have to be re-lit, dropped on to a chair, laid her arms on the table, and hid her face in them. 'Three months more,' she thought, 'and me goin' weaker all the while.' Meanwhile, the man, riding along on a shiny pony was intent upon his day's outing. (pp. 9-10)

We also see Esther milking the cows and Vaughan's description suggests that she was fairly familiar with the subject:

Esther had on the blue-print sunbonnet that had hung on the cowshed door since she first took over from her mother the business of milking. She fetched the three-legged stool from the corner, and seating herself upon it, nestled her head into Maggie's warm flank, and murmuring 'Whoa there - whoa there,' passed her hands gently over the four teats in turn, and began to tug at them with calm regularity. The rustle of litter and the clank of chains as the cows moved in the stalls, the monotonous munching noise made by their slow-working jaws and the sharp hiss of the two jets of milk spurting into a tin pail filled the drowsy twilight of the shed. (p. 138)

In the idyllic rusticity of the description there is also hidden a knowledge of the task.

Vaughan's correspondence reveals that descriptions of Esther milking and chopping wood were drawn from her first hand experiences in the First World War, which is an important element in the credible fictional portrayal of working-class women's lives, as

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<sup>244</sup> Beauman, *A Very Great Profession*, p. 100.

Beauman has suggested. In a letter dated 1916, Boris Tchitchearin, a family friend, writes, 'I hope the cow that you milk is behaving decently, has not kicked you or upset the milk-pail.'<sup>245</sup> Another letter from W. Tallis in 1919, reminds the young Vaughan about the days of the Timber Girls at war, 'when your hands were so blistered and sore with using an axe.'<sup>246</sup> Although Vaughan hailed from the upper-middle classes, her war work brought her into close contact with working-class women and she gained knowledge of their work and the problems they suffered. As previously mentioned, a letter from Myrtle Wood shows that she has had an illegitimate child and Hilda Vaughan has helped her find a place with a family as a domestic worker. The young woman writes to 'thank you very much for the faith you had in me...'<sup>247</sup> Diane Richardson has pointed out that:

[w]hat was different about feminism after the turn of the century was an increasing emphasis on the welfare of mothers, on the very real problems and difficulties mothers faced, rather than the unique contribution women could make to public life by virtue of their 'domestic qualities'. Unlike nineteenth-century feminism, the primary concern was trying to bring about changes which would improve the position of women within the home.<sup>248</sup>

Although Vaughan does not write about suffragism and the New Woman with enthusiasm, her portrayal of the working-class woman in *The Battle to the Weak* shows that she certainly is concerned about the issues with which this newer feminism engages.

In fact, book one of *The Battle to the Weak* could be read as a feminist treatise. It emphasises the injustices faced by women and raises questions about women's roles.

Early on in the novel, Esther's Aunt Polly questions sexual double standards, asking her

<sup>245</sup> Letter from Boris Tchitchearin to Hilda Vaughan, July 9<sup>th</sup>, 1916. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>246</sup> Letter from W. Tallis to Hilda Vaughan, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1919. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>247</sup> Letter from Myrtle Wood to Hilda Vaughan, undated but likely to have been written between 1914 and 1920. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>248</sup> Richardson, *Women, Motherhood and Childrearing*, p. 112.

niece, 'why shouldn't an 'oman be havin' her fancy same as a man?' (p. 30). To this Esther has no answer. It is Gladys, Esther's sister, who becomes the real mouthpiece of feminist social consciousness in the text, though. In conversation with Esther as they wash dishes, she rails against the gendered division of labour:

'Allus takin' the easy jobs for theirselves the boys is,' Gladys burst out. 'I could be sendin' the dogs up after the sheep as good as them... the men is knowin' well enough what is the dull jobs, and those they is leavin' to us.'  
'But we're not havin' the strength for all as they do,' Esther expostulated as she dried a cup with a deft turn of the cloth in her hand. Gladys answered with an impatient shrug. 'We're havin' the strength to keep on at the hay-makin' all day, though we shan't drive the machine as is the lightest job o' the lot; and we're havin' the same strength to break our backs just, plantin' potatoes, and pickin' stones and doin' anythin' as it don't take the men's fancy to do theirselves. Look at the old stone floors, now. 'Tis a hard day's work to be scrubbin' the lot in a house o' this size, but after doin' it we must be on our feet to wait on the men when they do come back from leanin' against the walls o' the pubs on market day. I've no patience with 'em. There's Father to-day, ridin' off to Llangantyn as soon as he's had his breakfast – like a king just, after me puttin' a polish on his boots – and poor Mother walkin' all the way to town when she's done her morning's work, carryin' two great old baskets full o' butter and eggs. Is that along o' her not havin' the strength to do his job? Go on!' (pp. 135-6)

She also argues that the law does not protect the female family members. When the family hear that Mr. Bevan is returning from the market drunk and dangerous, Gladys asks:

What's the law for, I do say, if a man may be ill-usin' of an 'oman and robbin' of the children as is dependin' on him, and shoutin' and swearin' about the place like what he'll be doin' when he do come back to-night? Why, they'd run him in for breaking the peace if he was to carry on anywhere else like what he do do in his own home. Is it bein' fair as all of us should be made to suffer by him? 'Tis a wicked thing, tyin' folks up in families so as the innocent shall be punished along o' the guilty. (pp. 139-140)

It is her questioning of the casual injustice meted out to women that gets her killed. When she confronts her father, asking him 'what right' (p. 146) he has to beat them, John Bevan strikes her so hard that she is paralysed. The narrative describes the way in which, '[a]ll

sensation had left her. She could not feel the bed on which she lay, nor the clothes that covered her ... She might not die for years to come, but she would lie here dying, oh! so slowly' (p. 151). Her fate is symbolic of her position in society. In her paralysis, the working-class female is rendered utterly helpless. Despite her conservative portrayal of women elsewhere, then, here Vaughan's message is undeniably feminist.

### III

It is notable, however, that it is Gladys and not Esther who voices this anger. Although she stands up to her father and even demands that he pays her a wage (p. 163), she can only do this once Gladys' injuries have rendered Esther, as the remaining able-bodied woman, indispensable. Esther cannot be the mouthpiece of feminism as she is the heroine of the novel, and like the majority of Vaughan's heroines, she is attributed with idealised qualities. Esther is emblematic of all that is good in womankind to Rhys. While he gazes into her eyes, he observes what, 'kind eyes they are; and a kind and generous mouth... If ever I seed the face of a good 'oman, there it is, with all in it as I 'ould like to have seen in my mother's and all as ever I dreamed of in a sweetheart's' (p. 33). In fact, the heroines in Vaughan's novels often have to remind others not to idealise them. Esther cautions Rhys, '[d]on't you go to think me what I'm not, else you might change your mind when you did find me out, and want to see me no more' (p. 57). Similarly, in *Pardon and Peace* Flora is renowned throughout the village as a faultless wife, 'devoted to' her husband (p. 35). As Flora remarks to Mark, '[y]ou like making out that I'm a ministering angel, don't you?' (p. 81). Vaughan is conscious that her female protagonists might be seen as a little too good to be true but she does not seem to take any heed of her heroines' calls for constraint in her own portrayal of them in the narrative.

Vaughan's heroines are strong women who display fortitude in character. Esther's strength is inherent, as Rhys attempts to describe: 'I can't put it into words, not exactly; but it's a sort o' dignity, for all you're young and shy, as puts me in mind of the women I read of in history, brave and strong women with a mind above any I've ever met' (pp. 38-9). Vaughan's strong heroines were admired by the female press, at the time, but they were not feminist role models, as we can see from a review from the September 1925 edition of *Good Housekeeping*:

If Miss Vaughan's work is worth anything at all, it is because she is bringing something individual to literature... And she does bring something individual. She brings to literature that rare quality so generally lacking in the well-written super-subtle women's novel of to-day – feminine strength, the strength that does not ape the masculine and is as simple and unselfconscious in its showing as the strength of those deceptive creatures, our grandmothers: the strength of Eve maternal, not of Eve enchantress: a strength of the spirit that is the special gift of women as strength of intellect is the gift of man.<sup>249</sup>

It is notable that this strength is not seen as masculine, unlike that of the New Woman, and that it harks back to an earlier time. The strength of Vaughan's heroines is at its height in Esther Bevan and even manifests itself in her physically. We can see this as Megan watches Esther chop wood:

Megan watched her lift another log from the pile and split it as neatly as the last, throwing the two halves into a basket at her side. With untiring regularity she went through the same movements again and again, only varying them when a stubborn log required to be raised with the axe or embedded deep in it, to be knocked against the block until at the second or third blow it split. The sleeves of her black bodice, rusty with age, were rolled up, and showed her white arms, muscular as those of a man but more rounded. Her figure had developed in the last year from girlish strength, spare and angular, to the fullness of womanhood. Her dress, that had survived from days of immaturity, fitted her too tightly across the broad shoulders and hips, and Megan, watching her, saw the curves of her body displayed in every movement. (p. 128)

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<sup>249</sup> *Good Housekeeping*, September 1925.

Her 'almost' masculine strength is tempered and softened by the emphasis on her femininity. The regularity of her movement suggests a constancy and dependability. Esther's strength does not reproduce the rash brutality of her father but has softness and serenity that are the attributes of specifically female power in Vaughan's novels.

Vaughan's male characters look weak in comparison and often have moral or spiritual failings. The imbalance between Vaughan's strong females and weak males was a source of sarcastic comment in a review of *The Battle to the Weak* in *Sketch*, in 1925:

Poor Esther was doomed to suffer. In fact, all the female protagonists in this story were doomed to suffer, whilst all the male protagonists, with the possible exception of the hero, were selfish, drunken, or profane. A very bad lot of gentlemen, and a very ill-used set of ladies. This book is written by a lady, and I have noticed in novels written by ladies that the male characters are not very brilliant specimens of their sex, whilst the female characters have the devil of a rotten time. I wonder if this is so in real life? I must be careful, because it may be so in Wales. ...<sup>250</sup>

While Vaughan's feeble male characters were criticised, it is significant that the strong heroines of the texts pose no serious threat to patriarchy. In fact, female strength is often employed in a manner that paradoxically reinforces the values of the patriarchal society. Esther's strong character binds her to her weak family and makes her stay at home to nurse them, rather than run away with Rhys. She declares, "I am bein' boss here from now on ... Boss along o' their weakness. But 'tis the same weakness as is keepin' me here, like what no power on earth couldn't be doin'" – and at the moment of her triumph her eyes filled with tears' (p. 165). Similarly, Nest, in *The Curtain Rises*, has transformed herself with a great deal of determination, from a barmaid in a colliery town into a successful playwright. Her overwhelming constancy to her rather worthless lover, however, causes her to sacrifice her best work. She writes to Julian that

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<sup>250</sup> *Sketch*, March 11th, 1925.



I have made my plays for you. All but one. It was the best work I ever did. I destroyed it lest it should give you pain. Yes. I was traitor to the dramatist whose ambitious spirit other men knew, but I was true to the woman, at whose existence you only guessed. (p. 464)

The strong heroine is ultimately subservient to the male in Vaughan's novels. In *The Invader*, Daniel says that the heroine figure, Monica, 'ouldn't never be bossing a man. She 'ouldn't be trying to march on before, but following after gentle, like what an 'oman did ought to do' (p. 196). Despite her fortitude she is no feminist and observes her place in the patriarchal structure.

Vaughan seems at pains to point out that her heroines are different from the flighty, freedom-seeking modern girl. When Monica first meets Fay Sinclair in *The Invader* she recognises their difference: 'I'm not her kind ... I should be a fool to copy her. I belong to the open air, like a tough bit of mountain heather, and nothing I can say is of much interest to her' (p. 247). Vaughan's firm identification of the heroine with the rural is significant and provides a stark contrast with many of the less appealing female figures that she portrays. Esther also compares herself with the modern shop assistants, who, as we have seen, are so alarming to her. She observes, 'I've not the looks o' these young gals about us, nor I haven't none o' their wiles and trickses neither' (p. 259). Here, most importantly, the modern girl is associated with loose living while the heroine is a highly moral figure. The heroine's moral purity is emphasised by Vaughan. Monica is described by Daniel as '[c]lear as a new-cleaned window-pane, she is. You can see what's going on inside' (p. 334). Stanley tells Saul Alcazan that Nest 'was brought up respectable Nonconformist' (p. 307). Similarly, Esther is governed by strict rules of propriety as we see when Rhys takes her to a drapers and milliners:

The trying on of hats was an even greater ordeal to Esther for she was urged to do her hair a 'little less severely,' and Rhys suggested that she should take it down there and then which greatly shocked her. To her mind such a procedure would have been a little less immodest than undressing in public. (p. 259)

The strength and morality of the heroine are intertwined as Esther explains to Gladys, '[t]ryin' to do what's right, I'll be, so long as I do have strength' (p. 78). It should be noted, however, that the heroine's first duty is to her own moral standards, which come before the social laws of propriety. In the end of *The Battle to the Weak*, Esther goes to Rhys' house to nurse him. Her brother is enraged and points out that their unmarried status deems her presence at Rhys' house improper, declaring her 'the shame and laughin'-stock o' the parish' (p. 282). Esther flouts convention for her love. Similarly Flora's affair with Mark is punished by the text but Flora says that, '[m]y love, itself, never seemed wrong, you know. I don't think love ever can be' (p. 198). The moral code of the heroine is paramount but she is certainly no passive slave to convention.

As their highly prized morals testify, there is a sense that Hilda Vaughan's heroines are caught between two eras, the Victorian and the modern. A review of *The Curtain Rises* in the *Daily Telegraph* remarks that:

One of the surprising results of the emancipation of women has been a falling-off in the standard of heroines. Where to-day can we match the women of Victorian novels: Maggie Tulliver, Dinah Morris, Jane Eyre – that dove with an eagle's soul – or any one of Meredith's glorious gallery of women? Has achievement outrun desire? Future historians will record that, in the hour of their triumph, women painted their faces and adopted the seductive role in fiction. As a champion of the female character, Miss Hilda Vaughan holds a torch before her fellow-novelists, and her latest heroine, Nest Owen, is worthy of her predecessors.<sup>251</sup>

Indeed, the heroines' links to the Victorian era and their adoption of its behavioural codes are seen in the novels. Nest's refusal of Saul Alcazan's proposition is met with the latter's assertion that 'you pretend that you're living in the reign of Victoria the Good' (p. 313).

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<sup>251</sup> *Daily Telegraph*, July 12<sup>th</sup>, 1935.

Rhys asks Esther, '[w]hy d'you wear those black clothes so much too old for you ... Will you come with me now and let me buy you a becoming frock and a hat that doesn't look like the one that Queen Victoria wore' (p. 257). The heroine of Vaughan's novels has modern freedoms but Victorian sensibilities. Flora's life is constrained within her Victorian surroundings as Mark notes when he visits Ty-Mawr [sic]:

Mark frowned at the black marble clock upon the mantel-piece. He had a queer feeling that it announced the hour of five on some afternoon in the last century. Time stood still in this room, the windows of which were shut. The air was warm and stuffy ... this was not only where she lived, but how. (p. 50)

Beauman has commented that '[a]s the shadow of the nineteenth century receded ... there is during the 1920s very little deference to duty and a large amount of sympathy for those who have been ensnared in its name.'<sup>252</sup> While others were busy breaking the taboos of the Victorian era, Vaughan seems unwilling to join them.<sup>253</sup> The harsh effects of duty are felt by Esther, who loses her fiancé due to her sense of obligation to her family.

Similarly, Flora marries her injured cousin out of pity, which constitutes '[a] sort of giving my body to be burnt' (p. 48), as she puts it. Despite this, a sense of duty is so prevalent in Vaughan's heroines that it seems to be worn as a badge of honour by the heroine and prized by the text. The author simultaneously disapproves of the suffering caused by Victorian codes of propriety while endorsing her heroines' adherence to them.

This is one of many traits that Vaughan's heroines share with those depicted in the work of her contemporary, Kate Roberts. In an article that discusses feminism in Roberts' work Delyth George characterises the female characters found in her novels and short stories. Her description of them is reminiscent of Esther and Flora: 'Merched

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<sup>252</sup> Beauman, *A Very Great Profession*, p. 61.

<sup>253</sup> See Alison Light, *Forever England: Femininity, Literature and Conservatism Between the Wars* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 33: Light discusses how writers such as Ivy Compton-Burnett broke the taboos of Victorian propriety.

annibynol eu hysbryd, a hunangynhaliol yn emosiynol ydynt; nodweddion a gysylltir yn draddodiadol â'r gwryw.'<sup>254</sup> [They are women who are independent of spirit and emotionally self-sufficient; features traditionally associated with the male.] She goes on to say: 'Mae Kate Roberts yn amlwg yn ceisio sefydlu llais y ferch, a'r llais hwnnw mor groch ar adegau nes boddi gwrywod ei gweithiau. Ac o ganlyniad tadogir arnynt hwy nodweddion gwendid.'<sup>255</sup> [Kate Roberts is obviously trying to establish the voice of the woman, a voice so loud that at times it drowns out the men in the texts. And as a result weak characteristics are affiliated with them.] This, as we have seen, was also a feature of Vaughan's work. George has also observed that: 'Ceidwaid y fframwaith cymdeithasol partriarchaidd yw ei gwragedd er gwaethaf eu personoliaethau cryf.'<sup>256</sup> [Her women are custodians of the patriarchal social framework despite their strong personalities.] This is also a notable trait of Vaughan's heroines, whose strengths seem even to reinforce patriarchal values. Perhaps if Vaughan is not following the rebellion of the modern writers, she is part of a Welsh movement of women writing about a particularly Welsh female character. The Welshness of Vaughan's heroines is emphasised in her novels in stark contrast to the English and / or urban setting for the New Woman, lesbian and modern girl. Rhys reflects that one reason that draws him to Esther is the fact that 'She's of the land ... from which the both of us was springin'' (p. 285). Even Monica, who is actually English, becomes an honorary Welsh person due to her possession of attributes usually found in the idealised Welsh heroine of Vaughan's novels. As Mary Anne's father says, 'indicating to Monica with his thumb. "You'd almost say she was one o' us,

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<sup>254</sup> Delyth George, 'Kate Roberts – Ffeminist?', *Y Traethodydd* 140 (1985) 185-202 (186). All further references are to this edition.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid*, p. 187.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid*, p. 188.

she's that pleasant' (p. 113). The Welsh heroine seems to be a unique figure that comes with specific traits and characteristics that are ascribed to her nationality.

The Welsh female, it seems, is spirited but does not overtly threaten patriarchy in the same way as her English counterpart at this time. Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan, in her article on the Temperance movement in Wales, makes the point that their work for the organisation,

clearly raised women's consciousness in the modern, feminist sense. It is all too easy to underestimate the radical change in women's lives which was brought about by participation in what may appear to us today as an essentially conservative organization, reinforcing the view of women as wives and mothers above all.<sup>257</sup>

Lloyd-Morgan makes a case for a specifically Welsh brand of feminism that is less radical than other feminisms but in no way insignificant. Vaughan's strong heroines are part of this Welsh feminism that does not usurp the male role but advocates a feminine strength that is palpable in the novels. It is interesting to note that the contest in *The Invader* between Daniel Evans and Miss Webster is underscored by another contest for supremacy between Daniel and his potential bride, Mary Anne Jones. The English feminist is beaten, but the Welsh woman wins her less conspicuous battle as an alternative feminism from the 'English' model prevails. It is epitomised in the character of Mary Anne and her formidable mother. Mrs. Jones is 'a woman of masterful appearance' (p. 93), yet she refers to her husband as 'Master', 'for so, unconscious of irony, she chose to call her submissive partner' (p. 94). We are told that 'there was a strong resemblance between her and her handsome offspring' (p. 93). It is displayed in more than just looks since, throughout the novel, we see Mary Anne use her wits to outmanoeuvre Daniel and secure him for her husband. She usurps the male prerogative in

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<sup>257</sup> Lloyd-Morgan, *Our Mother's Land*, p. 148.

choosing her partner: 'Mary Anne also looked at Daniel, but in her eyes was not the abject love of those who rejoice to serve, but the desire of one who wills to possess' (p. 72). Aware that Daniel's marrying is forbidden by his mother, Mary Anne hatches a plan to force him into wedlock by falsifying her pregnancy and tricking him into signing a document in which he promises to marry her (p. 181). During their courtship Mary Anne is always covertly seizing the male role. As Daniel plans his seduction of her, presupposed masculine supremacy is undermined:

'I'll make sure o' her now,' he promised himself. 'There shall be no more delay.' It might have shaken his faith in himself as man the conqueror, the disposer of his own fate and that of his chosen woman, had he known what Mary Anne was thinking as she drove home in discreet silence beside her mother. (p. 144)

The word 'discreet' is key here. Mary Anne's active role in bringing about her marriage is in stark contrast with the dependency of the woman that we saw earlier on in this chapter. Daniel Evans is doubly emasculated; first by his mother, who will not let him marry, and then by Mary Anne, who tricks him into it. With marriage as the end result, patriarchy and tradition are upheld, or only subtly undermined, while the woman gets exactly what she wants. Although Vaughan's idealised moral heroines would certainly never do this, they, Mary Anne, her mother and Mrs. Evans all display a uniquely Welsh brand of feminism. They are all strong Welsh women who are powerful while simultaneously upholding conservative ideals.

'Wouldn't my sisters say I was shocking?' asks Connie with naïve daring in *Pardon and Peace* (p. 125). The question implies an awareness of the scrutiny of other women who were passing judgement on those who took advantage of their new-found freedom. Vaughan's portrayals of female characters in her novels position her as one such judge. Her rendering of the spinster, the New Woman and the lesbian repeat many

of the vilifying criticisms levelled at them in the culture of the time and betrays an outlook which borders on the fiercely anti-feminist. Vaughan's cynical depiction of the modern girl ultimately presents her as a figure for pity rather than animosity. Meanwhile, the modern mother is a rather incompetent and often very harmful creature in Vaughan's novels, revealing anxieties about the abilities of the modern woman as mother. Despite her negative portrayal of many female characters, however, Vaughan shows a genuine concern for the welfare of working-class women and highlights many of the injustices suffered by them due to unequal social conditions. While it is highly unlikely that Vaughan would have considered herself a feminist, she does share many of the social welfare-related concerns with the contemporary feminist movement. Her heroines inhabit a complex ideological position. They are remarkably strong figures who display a willingness to flout convention, yet present no real threat to patriarchy. Perhaps, though, a uniquely Welsh feminism can be claimed for Hilda Vaughan, along with the writing of Kate Roberts and the interpretation of Welsh culture by Ceridwen Lloyd-Morgan. It is a feminism that, like Vaughan's heroines, is caught between two eras, unable to escape the moral absolutes of the Victorian era while embracing the strong role played by the woman in the twentieth century, rather than reverting to that of the despotic matriarch of Victorian tradition. Perhaps this is due, in part, to the fact that in belonging to an old minority culture, Welsh feminism must also safeguard tradition. Vaughan's heroines are determined and spirited but, unlike their English counterparts, they are certainly in no danger of shocking their sisters.

## Chapter Five

### **'I am looking across the valley and sighing to be back there': Place in the Novels of Hilda Vaughan**

In the hundreds of reviews that Hilda Vaughan kept in three volumes of scrapbooks, the overwhelming impression of the author is as a writer of place. Her portrayal of the Welsh countryside, and particularly her beloved Radnorshire, drew frequent comparisons with other writers whose work was associated with a specific location, such as Thomas Hardy, Sheila Kaye-Smith and Mary Webb. Another recurring comparison is made in a review of *Her Father's House* in the *New York Times*:

The setting is the county of Radnor in Wales. The author has made this country as much hers as the Brontës did their moors. She feels the essence of the land and the people who are close to it.<sup>258</sup>

In fact, the most severe criticism of her work is provoked when Vaughan's characters cross the border and the plot moves into England.<sup>259</sup> The author's own relationship with the Welsh countryside, however, was less straightforward than the contemporary reviews suggest. Vaughan was partially dislocated from the setting of her novels; she left Wales for London in the early 1920s and though she often returned to her native country, the English capital remained her permanent home. Vaughan also spent several years during the Second World War in America, and it was from this position of literary exile that she

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<sup>258</sup> *New York Times*, September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1930.

<sup>259</sup> For example, a review of *Her Father's House* in the *Times Literary Supplement*, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1930, points out that 'Miss Vaughan does not appear to be on safe ground when she abandons the Welsh countryside for low life in London; her emotional control weakens perceptibly and a rather lavish sentimentality descends on her otherwise charming young pair of lovers, who are, very properly, packed off to Wales just before the end.' In addition, a review of *Pardon and Peace* in the *Woman's Journal*, October, 1945, complains that, '[t]he Bayswater Road should never have been allowed to impinge upon our memories of the green valleys of Wales.'



wrote *Iron and Gold*.<sup>260</sup> It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that the portrayal of landscape in Vaughan's novels recalls Erica Carter's description of place as 'space to which meaning has been ascribed.'<sup>261</sup> The complex relationship between place and identity is explored in all of Vaughan's texts but is particularly prominent in *The Invader* (1928), *Her Father's House* (1930), *A Thing of Nought* (1934) and *Iron and Gold* (1948). Early on in her writing career, Charles Morgan had warned his wife against 'writing scenery for scenery's sake-... for it's going to be as dull as an empty stage.'<sup>262</sup> Morgan need not have worried, however, for in Vaughan's novels, even when the stage is bare, it is never emptied of meaning.

## I

Several of Vaughan's novels are characterised by their protagonists' passionate connection with place. In *Her Father's House*, Nell Tretower places all that is beloved to her in order of precedence. She reflects that she loves her father 'more than she had ever loved the mother for whose tenderness she used to yearn, more than the little sister who awakened her protective pity, more even than Old Tom, her dearest playmate and friend, but less than she loved this place where she was born.'<sup>263</sup> Similarly, in *The Invader*, Daniel Evans' love of his home is portrayed as a trait that he shares with his compatriots:

We Welshmen... are loving the land on which we was born and where we have fought so hard for a living. If ours was a kinder soil, maybe we 'ouldn't take such a pride in having tamed it. But to me now, Plas Newydd was as a child to the

<sup>260</sup> Though *Iron and Gold* was not published in Britain until 1948, it first appeared in America as *The Fair Woman* (New York: Duell Sloane & Pearce, 1942).

<sup>261</sup> Erica Carter quoted by Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttal in the Introduction to *Text, Theory, Space: Land, Literature and History in South Africa and Australia*, ed. Kate Darian-Smith, Liz Gunner and Sarah Nuttal (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 1-20 (p. 3).

<sup>262</sup> Letter from Charles Morgan to Hilda Vaughan, dated September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1922, reproduced in Charles Morgan, *Selected Letters of Charles Morgan*, ed. Eiluned Lewis (London: Macmillan, 1967), p.62.

<sup>263</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *Her Father's House* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1930), p. 126. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

mother that cried out for it in her labour. 'Twas more nor that even. 'Twas as a part of my own body, and taking it off o' me was like chopping off my hand.<sup>264</sup>

The juxtaposition of the quotations conveys the perception of the landscape as a place of birth for the Welsh and also a place to which they have given birth; denoting the symbiotic relationship as the land shapes the inhabitants and it is, in turn, shaped by them. The land, as a birthplace and part of the self, plays an important role in constructing both Nell and Daniel's sense of identity. As the latter's words imply, however, this affiliation is all the more potent because it is under threat. Daniel has lost the tenancy of Plas Newydd to an English incomer, Miss Webster, who has inherited the property. His desire to reclaim the land becomes almost fanatical as he wages a parodic colonial war against the English 'invader'. Nell's single-minded devotion to place is also the result of a painful separation from her home. At the beginning of the novel she is taken from the ancestral house during the night (p. 3) and as a young woman she is exiled even further, living unhappily in London (p. 257). Alone, heavily pregnant and almost penniless, Nell walks all the way from London to Wales, undertaking the harsh 'journey to her own country that her son might be born there' (p. 323). Despite the risk to her own life and that of her child, Nell's determination to reclaim her place of birth is portrayed positively. She returns to a crumbling estate that is renewed and regenerated by the birth of a new Welsh generation. She tells her husband of her vow 'to keep this place and make it again as it was, and pass it on to our son when the time do come... There'll not be a tree come down as I can save by my labours' (p. 344). While Daniel's reclaiming of the land by underhand means is less noble, as he tricks and intimidates Miss Webster, the narrative provides a partial defence of his actions. He explains that 'when strangers are

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<sup>264</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Invader* (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1928), p. 213. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

using their greater riches to dispossess us, and we are using our wits, as is all we've got, to defend ourselves, then they are calling us dishonest, cunning rogues' (p. 214). The texts do not endorse the endeavours of Welsh characters to reclaim their land at any cost, however. As we saw in the first chapter of this thesis, *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* depicts Gwenllïan wresting back control over her estate. In order to do so, however, she must kill her English husband, revealing that a Welsh devotion to land can be dangerously pathological. A love of the land is met with varying degrees of approval by the texts, but a constant factor is a sense of its potential loss.

The close link between the land and its inhabitants is central to Vaughan's novels, since they largely portray an agricultural community, in which the very lives of its members are dictated by the landscape. This relationship is conveyed in *Iron and Gold* as Owain's chores follow the pattern of the seasons:

In spring there was the lambing... Summer long he sweated in the labours of shearing and harvest... With autumn, after the strain of threshing, he dressed himself warm and spruce and took his grain to the mill... Winter brought long evenings at the fireside, time for mending his gear, but seldom an hour for idling.<sup>265</sup>

The significance of this interdependency is translated into the structure of the text itself, which is divided into the four seasons. *Iron and Gold*, set in a distant past, depicts a close relationship between man and land that, at the time of its writing, was rapidly vanishing.<sup>266</sup> Its composition followed a lengthy period of intermittent agricultural depression which had resulted in mass rural depopulation. Richard Moore-Colyer states that in the mid nineteenth century half of the population of Britain lived in the country

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<sup>265</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *Iron and Gold* (1948; Dinas Powys: Honno, 2002), p. 100. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

<sup>266</sup> *Iron and Gold* depicts the ancient Welsh folktale of the Lady of Llyn-y-Fan-Fach but Vaughan sets her version in the eighteenth century, though there are slippages in the depiction of time as we will see in chapter six of this thesis, in which the relationship between this novel, the folk tale and the past is explored.

and 'the interests of farm and community were largely as one. But within two generations this link had been virtually severed.... [B]etween 1918 and 1939, the great mass of the people finally lost contact with the land their ancestors had created.'<sup>267</sup> In Wales, the loss of the rural way of life also threatened the language, traditions and culture that were associated with it. There are subtle hints of this process of dislocation in *Iron and Gold* as the bard-turned-farmer, Owain, is haymaking with the field-hands:

he livened them up with an ancient ballad that lifted the stoop and sweep of their limbs. Generations, whose blood throbbed through his veins, had toiled with these same movements to this rugged tune and had repeated these words until they were defaced as a coin by language, their meaning quite forgot. Knowing no more than a bird does what it was he sang, he heard his chant rise and fall and gave it no heed. (p. 96)

In this scene the people, their history and culture, represented in song, become an organic part of the landscape they inhabit. The sense of harmonious continuation is fractured, however, as Owain has lost access to the meaning of his ancient song's words and this important link with an ancestral way of life. It is something that he fails to acknowledge which suggests that this rift can only increase. Even when man and place seem intertwined, there is a melancholic allusion to loss of identity.

The description of Owain and his workers reproducing the actions of past generations in the fields also alerts us to the significance of place in constructing memory. While the fields are the site of collective recollection, interior spaces, as Rob Shields has remarked, also 'become encrusted with souvenirs to the point of becoming an extension of the memory.'<sup>268</sup> This idea is encountered in *Iron and Gold* as the ancient bed in Owain's home is symbolic of his link with ancestors as well as their close relation to

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<sup>267</sup> Richard Moore-Colyer, 'Back to the Land', *Planet*, vol 175 (February/March 2006), 73-81 (73-4). All further references are to this edition.

<sup>268</sup> Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 269.

the land: '[i]ts posts were rough-hewn of oak that had grown upon the land tilled by his forefathers, and its solid comfort gave him ease' (p. 58). When Owain's fairy wife, Glythin, leaves him, however, their home becomes a repository for painful memories of the past and a former identity that has been lost, forgotten or discarded:

[t]here was nothing of her left to keep him company, but the carded wool on the distaff, awaiting her hand to spin, the curds she had set in the bowl from which she would no more sup. In their bedroom he opened the closet where her clothes hung. Beside his jack-boots stood a slipper worn down at heel and shaped to the little foot that had trodden its housewife errands in his service. Before the mirror, which showed him his lone face, lay a comb; and one hair was in it, like a thread of honey. (pp. 196-7)

He then notes a symbol of his youth as an idealistic young bard, 'the small harp which he used to carry' (p. 197). In a similar manner, the entire text, in its retelling of the ancient Welsh legend of Llyn-y-Fan-Fach, is an imaginary revisiting of a place that is particularly resonant with memories of the Welsh past and lost culture and traditions. While she wrote *Iron and Gold* in America, Vaughan was pining for her native landscape. A letter from an American friend, Susan Porter, describes how the two searched for vistas that reminded Vaughan of her home. Porter writes that '[t]his country did give you something you needed – you exiled from your own Wild Wales.'<sup>269</sup> As we have seen, however, the allusion to landscape and loss is not confined to *Iron and Gold*. In a letter to a French student, Vaughan reveals that her novels 'are concerned with a Wales which is now almost vanished. Many of my characters were old people when I was very young. Everything has now been changed by increased industrialisation and increasing speed of

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<sup>269</sup> Undated letter from Susan Porter, High Pastures, Big Sur, California, to Hilda Vaughan. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

communications.<sup>270</sup> This endeavour to capture a receding way of life is reminiscent of the nostalgic portrayal of the Welsh countryside in *Dew on the Grass* (1934), a semi-autobiographical novel in which Eiluned Lewis revisits the Montgomeryshire home of her youth.<sup>271</sup> Vaughan depicts a landscape that commemorates loss on many levels; the loss of Welsh culture and language, the loss of a rural way of life, the loss of a bygone Wales and, of course, Vaughan's own partial disconnection with the land.

In *Her Father's House*, Nell Tretower discovers, and indeed, recovers her own lost Welsh past from its inscription in her surroundings. When she and her sister enter a church, they find it filled with memorial plaques to long-dead family members, which Nell points out to Bella:

'Here's another o' that name,' she announced in triumph, her dark brows drawn together in the effort to read rapidly one memorial tablet after another. 'His home was the Hafod too, Bella, and he was Lord Lieutenant o' the county and a benefactor of the poor, mourned by all who knew him. And here's another as died gloriously in the Low Countries, wherever they may be, a very gallant soldier, from what it says. Some of the oldest tablets do spell the name different – Tretwr instead o' Tretower; but 'tis the same name, sure to be, and 'tis ours, Bella.'  
(p. 32)

It is difficult to ignore the striking parallels here, between Nell's story and Vaughan's experience. Vaughan's personal papers contain evidence of her endeavours to trace her own link with the Vaughans of Tretower, a noble Welsh family whose court and castle are located near Crickhowell.<sup>272</sup> Nell's declaration that 'I'd dearly like to have come o'

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<sup>270</sup> Letter from Hilda Vaughan to Mademoiselle Annie Chaubaron, February 5<sup>th</sup>, 1954. Chaubaron was a PhD student who was writing a thesis on Wales and the Welsh. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>271</sup> Eiluned Lewis, *Dew on the Grass* (1934; Dinas Powys: Honno, 2006).

<sup>272</sup> Vaughan's personal papers contain many copies of old records of this family, recreations of family crests and attempts to create a family tree that would show her descent from the aristocratic Vaughans. In a letter from Hilda Vaughan to Charles Morgan, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1937 Vaughan writes about her visit to her 'ancestral district'. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan. This is explored in greater detail in chapter six of this thesis. In addition, the description of Nell's ancestral home in *Her Father's House*

that race' (p. 32), certainly seems to be a sentiment shared with the author. In fact, Nell's relationship with place reveals some similarities with that of Vaughan. The text begins with the memory of Nell's traumatic separation from her home, a significant psychological event that colours the rest of her life: '[s]he remembered nothing earlier, and nothing all her life more vividly, than being carried away from her home...' (p. 3). She later moves to London, described by her husband as a 'place of exile' (p. 219) for the couple. The entire last section of the novel subsequently details Nell's epic return journey to Wales. A letter from Vaughan to her husband in 1937 expresses her own desire to leave London for the Welsh countryside. She writes,

Oh you poor, blind, deaf, and noseless townsman!! How *can* you wonder why anyone longs to leave Campden Hill Square at this sweet-scented season of the year? ... Do you know that the marshy field that stretches away and away between the little flower garden of this *pet* of a house and the lake, will be one *mass* of golden water staffs in a few days' time? And the straggling Welsh hedges are still white with flowering may...<sup>273</sup>

Nell's return seems to represent something of a fantasy for the author, as letters show that throughout her life in London, Vaughan had been trying to persuade her husband to set up a home in the Wales but was met with her husband's reluctance to move from the capital.<sup>274</sup> It is a desire that seems to inform her writing; as G. F. Adam has remarked, the author 'sees her native country through a veil of distance and yearning. Indeed the return-

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bears a strong resemblance to pictures of Tretower Court. It is described as, 'built of small bricks mellowed by age to the colour of rich red earth, stone-faced, and powdered with golden lichen' (p. 89).

<sup>273</sup> Letter from Hilda Vaughan to Charles Morgan, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1937. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan. Vaughan was staying at Hen Ysgol, Bwlch, Breconshire at this time.

<sup>274</sup> In a letter from Charles Morgan to Hilda Vaughan, undated but most likely from 1922, he writes: 'I wonder about that Welsh cottage. It sounds good, though for myself I have a love of English things; but then for you the country means Wales - and those are the deep-grown, hereditary tastes that we can't hope to reconcile completely and that neither of us such fools as to allow to worry us. You know we shouldn't be in that Welsh cottage very much - at any rate not in our early years, at least I shouldn't I'm afraid. You see here I am within reach of telegrams from London, but I should never dare to play truant in Wales; so that for me it would mean just a month in the year - and then, probably we should want to go to Italy.' Twenty years later Vaughan's dream remained unrealised, as we can see in another letter from Morgan to Vaughan, dated June 19<sup>th</sup>, 1941, in which he writes that after the war they might try 'to find the real country house you would like.' Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

motive is central in her work.<sup>275</sup> Vaughan did return to Wales, however, as she found it difficult to write in the bustling capital. An article in the *Western Mail* in 1934 describes how she lived ‘for a part of each year in Wales and for the rest in the Campden Hill district of Kensington’.<sup>276</sup> Though Vaughan never took permanent residence in Wales again, her writing can be seen as a part of a literal and imaginative reconnection with her homeland.

## II

As a place of loss and reconnection with identity, the Welsh landscape in Vaughan’s novels is strewn with symbolic sites that signify aspects of Welsh culture and tradition. This recalls Pierre Nora’s idea of the ‘*lieux de mémoire*’ where memory crystallizes and secretes itself.<sup>277</sup> The first of these sites is the homestead, a location of prominence in many of Vaughan’s novels. In *A Thing of Nought* the homestead and its attending farm-buildings are ‘white as mushrooms in the green landscape.’<sup>278</sup> The home is a harmonious part of nature, growing unobtrusively as part of the land. This is reminiscent of the celebration of such buildings in Iorwerth C. Peate’s *The Welsh House* (1940). As Linda Adams has pointed out, in Peate’s portrayal, ‘native architecture is beautiful... because it is of and in the landscape.’<sup>279</sup> Peate states in this book that ‘the only national architecture

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<sup>275</sup> G. F. Adam, *Three Contemporary Anglo-Welsh Novelists: Jack Jones, Rhys Davies and Hilda Vaughan* (Bern, Switzerland: A. Francke AG., 1950), p. 103.

<sup>276</sup> *Western Mail*, August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1934.

<sup>277</sup> Pierre Nora, ‘Between Memory and Desire: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*’, *Representations* 26 (Spring, 1989), 7-25 (7).

<sup>278</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *A Thing of Nought*, in *A View Across the Valley: Short Stories by Women From Wales c.1850-1950*, ed. Jane Aaron (1934; Dinas Powys: Honno, 1999), pp. 132-171 (p. 133). All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

<sup>279</sup> Linda Adams, ‘Fieldwork: The Case of Broadsheets and the Welsh Anthropologist’, *Welsh Writing in English: A Yearbook of Critical Essays* 5 (1999) 51-85 (60).



is peasant architecture.<sup>280</sup> This link between the building and the nation is conveyed in Vaughan's texts as the white lime-washed farmstead is the symbol of Welsh family life. Owain's mother in *Iron and Gold* is seen bustling in the homestead waiting for her son to return from the fields:

All day, to an echo of her clogs upon the flagstones, she had awaited his homecoming and had remembered the patter of many feet, mirth and laughter, the rattle of company at table, a rough hug at evening, the warm sweat of her master's body. (p. 4)

The home reverberates with the memories of familial love and happiness. As this description suggests, it safeguards the traditional patriarchal structure of the Welsh society, advocating definite gender roles for its inhabitants which renders the home a microcosm of the nation. It is a place of security and nostalgia, filled with 'the glow of a peat fire' (p. 132) in *A Thing of Nought*. The cosy fireside is a place of cultural importance, bringing with it an association with 'the language of the hearth'. It is here that the homestead is filled with the sound of ancient ballads, jigs and lullabies, as Owain tells his family, '[l]isten now. This is the tune Mother learned off o' her Grannie. I'll be teaching it you' (p. 90). The home is a haven for Welsh language and culture that is passed on from generation to generation.

While the homestead is a private space, on occasions such as marriages, Christenings and funerals, it is transformed into a social space. During Owain and Glythin's wedding reception, the social codes of behaviour and hierarchy encroach into the home, imposing strict roles and a firm sense of identity. As the community gathers to wish the couple well, Owain's mother seats them around the table making a 'great to-do ... of getting everyone into place in order of rank' (p. 50). The stifling conventions within

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<sup>280</sup> Iorwerth C. Peate, *The Welsh House* (London: Cymmrodorion, 1940), p. 4. All further references are to this edition.

the social space are at their most influential in the Church and Chapel. At Owain and Glythin's wedding, the Church is a symbolic site in which the faith of past generations is preserved:

the air was cold and motionless as water at the bottom of a well, and even those youths and hoydens who had joked the loudest were awed as they tiptoed in, feeling the stagnation of prayers, once alive but long since formalized as the carving upon the chill, massive stones of the corbels. (p. 48)

It is not the judgement of God that is most prominent in the places of worship, however, but the condemnation of the community. Having married a woman of questionable origin, Owain is the subject of gossip at Church: '[h]eavy breathing and the creak of pews at his back made Owain aware that eyes watched him. "Envious they are of my good fortune," he told himself' (p. 48). Megan suffers the same scrutiny at chapel in *A Thing of Nought*. She has given birth to a child that does not resemble her husband, and 'the matrons who went to see Megan's baby whispered about it as they came out of chapel' (p. 161). While both are representative of the constrictive and deeply religious nature of Welsh culture, there are, of course, significant differences in the ideological positions of Church and Chapel in Wales. As we have seen in chapter three of this thesis, the community in *The Candle and the Light* are divided between the upper and middle-class, anglicised church-goers and the Welsh-speaking, working-class chapel-folk.<sup>281</sup> In *The Battle to the Weak* the church and chapel are placed on opposite sides of the street, symbolically at odds with one another.<sup>282</sup> Vaughan's novels portray the Church as part of an older and, perhaps, more 'authentic' Welsh culture than the Nonconformity that became almost synonymous

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<sup>281</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Candle and the Light*, (London: Macmillan & Co., 1954), p. 76. 'The professional class, to a man, and most of the wealthier trades-folk, were anglicized, members of the Church of England and Tories, like the neighbouring landed gentry. But the town's poorer classes and the farming community of the district spoke Welsh, were Nonconformist, [and] Liberal'.

<sup>282</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Battle to the Weak* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1925), p. 22.

with Wales in the nineteenth century. In the first chapter of *Iron and Gold* the narrator of the story, a bard in an industrialised Welsh town, ‘went to church of a Sunday, and on weekdays chanted, in a fading voice, ancient love songs to the thrum of his ancient harp’ (p. 1), while the miners ‘sang hymns to the organ in the chapel which they had built’ (p. 1). The chapel here is significantly a new building, in contrast with the ancient practices associated with the churchgoing bard. Similarly, Nell discovers her illustrious Welsh ancestry in a church that her Nonconformist mother does not wish her to enter (p. 33). The newer faith has symbolically hidden Nell’s true Welsh identity, located in the church, from her.

A temporary reprieve from the strict rules of the social spaces, seen in Church and Chapel, is offered as the fair comes to town and changes the politics of place. The fair is a site for love and courting in many of Vaughan’s texts, such as the rekindled love between Esther and Rhys in *The Battle to the Weak*. It can also be a place of shallow flirtation and seduction. In *Here are Lovers*, Gronwy’s dalliance with Susan is soon revealed to be the product of exciting surroundings rather than sincere feeling,<sup>283</sup> while in *Harvest Home* Daniel Hafod drunkenly attempts to seduce his servants at the fair.<sup>284</sup> It is a trope found in other Welsh texts such as Elena Puw Morgan’s *Y Wisg Sidan* (1939), where the fair is the setting for the servant girl, Mali’s, fall.<sup>285</sup> In *A Thing of Nought*, Megan encounters her sweetheart, Penry, at the fair. While the affection between the pair is genuine, the ambivalence of the site is also hinted at as Megan explores the surroundings with her suitor:

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<sup>283</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *Here Are Lovers* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1926), p. 25.

<sup>284</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *Harvest Home*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936), p. 82.

<sup>285</sup> Elena Puw Morgan, *Y Wisg Sidan* (1939; Llandysul: Gomer, 1995).

She went with him, elated by the scene – the white tents pitched upon the wet and shining field; the dizzy kaleidoscope of colours formed by roundabouts flashing with brass and gipsies' choice of paint; the throng of country folk, forgetful to-day of their Puritanism; the discordant clash of three or four organs playing different tunes, of bells ringing and people laughing, talking, shouting; the holiday jostling and fun of it all. (p. 135)

The surroundings induce a sense of inebriation and a lowering of inhibitions. It is a carnivalesque scene in which the moral codes of the community are inverted and the 'discordant clash' of the music suggests the clash of ideals at play as the social order is turned on its head in the formerly staid social space. It is at the fair that Owain meets his gipsy lover in *Iron and Gold*. Instead of the place of courtship portrayed in the novella, here, the fair is a place of lust for Owain:

He had feared to come to this place of foolish levity, lest he should meet the gipsy whom he had lusted after; and sure enough, she was in pursuit of him, a menace and a joy. Jostling in the enclosure between the giddy whirling roundabouts, was an army of younger men. The harsh light flickered upon their ruddy faces and lithe limbs. Those that had not brought their sweethearts, clasping them tight for safety, were bright-eyed in quest of one; and quick hot, shallow love was in the air. (pp. 152-3)

Significantly, their liaisons are confined to the liminal space. Owain visits 'fairs far and wide' (p. 158) to meet with the gipsy, Miriam, and is adamant that his relationship with her will last only for 'the season o' fairs' (p. 158). It is only when the relationship leaves the carnivalesque site that their behaviour has serious implications. Howell, Owain's brother, had previously encouraged the dalliance, but even he is shocked as his brother dances openly with Miriam at his son's wedding, overtly flouting the moral code of the community that governs the social space. The repercussions are severe indeed as their behaviour induces Glythin's permanent return to her lake dwelling in the mountains, another symbolic location.

The mountainous regions provide a more lasting retreat from the domestic, communal and social spaces. The wilderness is a place of individual rather than collective identity. It is the setting where Owain, at first, retreats to ponder and compose his songs: 'Every time he came to this lonely place, far above the dwellings of men that none climbed to but himself, it seemed to him more magical' (p. 16). High above the community, it is also above earthly concerns. It is the supernatural realm of the fairy, Glythin, who lives in the lake. As an inhabitant of the wilderness, Glythin's values are very different from those of the mortal dwellers in the valley below. When Owain tells his fairy-wife that he will not kill the young calf of the herd she has given him as her dowry, she is baffled, asking, '[w]hy should you kill any?' (p. 39). Her values are at odds with those of society, ultimately resulting in her return to her own realm. Glythin is forlorn at her son's christening as she hears the priest speak of original sin. She laments,

[m]ust this little blossom, ready to open natural as a flower-bud to the sun, be taught to credit such dark imaginings? They do wring the mercy o' God, whom man has created jealous, even in man's own image. (p. 84)

The moral code of the wilderness is free from the narrow-minded constraints of the human community. The mountainside symbolises freedom, solitude and a way of life that is not subject to the laws of civilization.

The symbolic nature of place is displayed most clearly in *The Invader*. It can be seen in the description of Daniel Evans' house:

he had a marble-papered attic which, though no water flowed in it, was in all else a bathroom with shining taps piously polished, and seemed to him and his friends an outstanding mark of his gentility – the more gentle because it served no purpose. His house was not as the houses of other farmers. It abounded in rooms and furniture for which its inhabitants had no use whatever. It had a brass gong that had never yet boomed announcement of any meal; and a suite of chairs, upholstered in red plush, upon which none save those distinguished guests, who never came, were privileged to sit. (p. 1)

Daniel's home is a very curious place indeed, where nothing is used for its intended purpose. In fact, the house operates on a purely symbolic basis, solely providing signs to others of Daniel's aspiration to gentility. Similarly, the landscape in *A Thing of Nought* can also be read in a symbolic way, alongside its factual topography. The origins of the tale itself are derived from actual features in the Welsh landscape, as Vaughan recounts in a speech that she delivered at the Sunday Times Book exhibition in 1934, entitled 'Why authors are cads':

One day, perhaps 15 years ago, I was riding up a lonely little road, between two high hills in a remote Welsh valley. A stream ran beside the road; the noise of its peat-stained waters and the mewing of a solitary buzzard overhead, were the only sounds that broke the stillness, except the occasional bleating of a mountain sheep and the sighing of the west wind.

Suddenly, round a bend in the road, I came across one isolated farmhouse. It was white-washed – the only white object in a vast green landscape. Facing it, upon the other side of the stream, was a gaunt square chapel, built of grey stone, with the care-taker's cottage clinging to its side – as a little shell might do to a strong rock.

Something about those two lonely dwelling places and that chapel, to which I imagined black-clad men and women coming from far away along that solitary road on a Sabbath, stirred my imagination. Many years afterwards, the seed dropped into my mind at that time bore fruit in the tale entitled 'A Thing of Nought'.<sup>286</sup>

In her composition of the tale, Vaughan can be seen as inscribing a real landscape with meaning. Its features are attributed symbolic significance as the sparse landscape of Cwmbach can be read as representing aspects of Welsh society:

Cwmbach was so strait that only for an hour at noon was its whole width lit by sunshine. The mountains rose like walls on either side shutting out the world. Down in the dingle lay the solitary farm and a stern chapel, square and grey, with the caretaker's cottage clinging to its side, as a white shell to a strong rock. An angry stream, hurling itself against the boulders, foamed between these two

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<sup>286</sup> Hilda Vaughan, extract from an unpublished speech given at Sunday Times Book Exhibition at Grosvenor House, London on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1934. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

dwelling places, and a thin ribbon of road wound its empty length up over the pass, where the hills converged. (p. 133)

Megan is strongly linked with the landscape she inhabits and we can read the topography in an almost psychoanalytical way. The hills imprison the heroine, isolating her in the Welsh landscape, separated from the rest of the world. They shut out happiness, represented by the sun, for all but a brief time. The 'angry' stream seems to symbolise the young Megan's unconscious, rebelling furiously against this oppression but repressed in favour of her meek acceptance. This river significantly cuts between the only two buildings in the valley, the homestead and the chapel, both bringing their own ties and duties to the family, tradition and religion. The road is a tantalising and mysterious means of escape into the outside world. We cannot see where it leads to, nor is Megan allowed to find out. It could also be read, however, as representing the 'one path, the old and narrow road to heaven' (p. 168) that the Methodist preacher, Megan's husband, advocates in his sermons. The landscape in *A Thing of Nought* operates simultaneously as a literal place and an allegory of rural Wales, representing all that is influential and, it seems, constrictive in society.

### III

Since the landscape can be read as allegorical of Welsh society, it is also a potential site of ideology, rendering its depiction politicised. The narrative viewpoint in any topographical description is therefore crucial. Both *A Thing of Nought* and *Iron and Gold* are narrated by figures that, in very different ways, reflect a dislocation with the rural landscape and a certain kind of Welsh identity. The narrator of *A Thing of Nought* is a woman who has left the country, having been told Megan Lloyd's tale during her 'last summer in Wales' (p. 132). She recounts the story years later, after being reminded of

Megan by Leonardo's painting of Saint Anne, while 'wandering through the Louvre' (p. 132). The cosmopolitan and urbane narrator has become far removed from the tale of Welsh rural life that she tells. In contrast, 'Badger' the bard, the narrator of *Iron and Gold*, is a figure steeped in traditional Welsh identity, as he sings 'ancient love songs' and recites old 'legends' (p. 1). He recounts the tale of the Lady of Llyn-y-Fan-Fach to members of a community that has lost its cultural heritage and rural-Welsh identity. In an early twentieth-century Welsh mining town, the Bard imparts the folk tale to 'young men with [formerly] ruddy cheeks' who 'came out of the earth in grimed clothes of a new cut with bleached faces, blackened over, and blue scars that could not be washed off' (p. 1). This is a new generation whose identity is reformed and, it is suggested, deformed by the industrialisation of the Welsh landscape. This idea engages with the contemporary concerns of Plaid Cymru and anthropologists such as R. G. Stapledon that the industrialisation of Wales and its consequential effect of depopulation and decline in rural areas were detrimental to Wales and its landscape (their ideas are also explored in chapter one of this thesis). Richard Moore-Colyer has observed that Stapledon's theories influenced Plaid Cymru's rural 'Back to the Land' policies as he asserted, 'that the non-material or "spiritual" needs of people, eradicated by urban existence lived on in the rural population wherein the true British national characteristics were enshrined'.<sup>287</sup> The inhabitants of the mining town in *Iron and Gold* are being reacquainted with their Welsh identity by the Bard in a sort of cultural 'Back to the Land' idea. In a similar manner, the culturally exiled narrator of *A Thing of Nought* is reintroduced to her Welsh roots through her recollection of Megan Lloyd's story, which depicts her return to the valley in the last pages of the tale (pp. 170-1). Moreover, while the depopulation of the Welsh rural

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<sup>287</sup> Moore-Colyer, *Planet*, p. 78.



landscape is suggested in the isolated setting of *A Thing of Nought, Iron and Gold* can be read as repopulating the landscape, literally going ‘back to the land’ of the past when it had been populated by a thriving agricultural community.

Moreover, Stapledon’s dichotomy of the spiritual country-folk and materialist urban-dwellers is explored in Vaughan’s novels. In *The Invader*, Daniel Evans’s connection with his land and property is portrayed as spiritual and emotional:

Through the gathering darkness, he could see its pale, beloved shape, which, all his life long, had been the expression in stone of his own spirit. Now, torn from it, he suffered as an earthbound soul may suffer in its division from the body through which alone its desires can be satisfied. (p. 121)

In contrast, his English rival for the land has a very different relationship with it. Her intellectual interest in the landscape, as a lecturer in an agricultural college for women, is described as ‘all theory and no practice’ (p. 55). In addition, as Jeni Williams, points out, Miss Webster, like the English Squire, Mr. Langdon, ‘has a legal right to inherit and work the land but, because she has no sense of place as a place of habitation and only sees it as a means of making money, she does not belong there.’<sup>288</sup> Vaughan’s belief in the spiritual, morally replenishing properties of the Welsh landscape and its contrast with the urban modernity is expressed in a letter to her husband, written in Laugharne:

there is the calm grey water, and there are the wet green fields and such a wide grey sky over-head and the sound of wind, sighing, and trees creaking gently, and sea-birds crying: and all these things bring me sanity and peace and help put me in my place – a ghoulishly self-absorbed little human being in a vast, tranquil, ever changing landscape. For here I am reminded constantly of what we forget in modern cities, that the grass will soon grow over our graves and the ivy cover up the ugly ruins of our homes. Melancholy! Morbid? No. Not being a ‘modern’, I

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<sup>288</sup> Jeni Williams, ‘The Intertexts of Literary History: “Gender” and Welsh Writing’, *European Intertexts: Women’s Writing in English in a European Context*, eds. Patsy Stoneman and Ana María Sánchez-Arce with Angela Leighton (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2005), pp. 156-176 (p. 164). All further references are to this edition.

find peace and a sense of proportion, that I've lost of late, in these 'thoughts in a country church-yard!'<sup>289</sup>

It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that the well-travelled path from Wales to London is also a journey into profligacy in Vaughan's novels. London is initially idealised by Nell (pp. 89-90) in *Her Father's House*, but she soon changes her mind. Nell's sister, Bella, takes the heroine's intended job in London to conceal her pregnancy. When Nell follows her there, she sees the detrimental effect the city has had on Bella, now a prostitute, who has had an abortion and has learnt that 'there's nothing money won't buy you in this place' (p. 184). The degeneracy of city life, especially in the English city, is found in the work of other Welsh women writers. Bertha Thomas' short story, 'The Way he Went', depicts the concerns voiced by a Welsh mother whose son is going to study at Oxford. Thomas writes, '[t]hat England spells the world, the flesh, and the devil was a time-honoured doctrine none cared to call in question.'<sup>290</sup> Illustrating this belief, there are many lengthy descriptions of the ills of the city in Vaughan's novel, of which this depiction of Nell's new neighbourhood is characteristic:

This half of Whitechapel swarmed with pale stunted children, as a rotten biscuit swarms with maggots. Through the little holes that were its doorways they wriggled forth to struggle together in the slime of its central gutter. The houses surrounding the narrow courtyard stared close at one another; the dirt of their windows and a rag or two hung across a broken pane were their only privacy. Few secrets were kept in this place, for the women were voluble and shrill-voiced, and the men shouted their domestic grievances and struck their blows so that all might hear. (p. 234)

It is no wonder that Nell, in accordance with the 'Back to the land' notions that are reflected in Vaughan's texts, wishes to return to her rural roots.

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<sup>289</sup> Letter from Hilda Vaughan to Charles Morgan, dated January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1938. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>290</sup> Bertha Thomas, 'The Way he Went', *Stranger Within the Gates*, ed. Kirsti Bohata (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2008), p. 48. The short story was originally published in Thomas's *Picture Tales of the Welsh Hills* (1913).

In *Iron and Gold* Vaughan makes a different sort of return, as the text revisits a pre-colonial landscape in the past. The English are present, but inhabit the periphery of the plot. The novel is set ‘while yet the Welsh was fighting some wicked old Norman kings’ (p. 1). It is a period in which Wales is on the brink of the colonial process, and crucially, at a point when Welsh history can be changed.<sup>291</sup> Glythin, as is befitting in this retelling of an ancient tale, is a sovereignty figure that harks back to the medieval romances of the *Mabinogion*. Glenys Goetinck, as we have previously seen, identifies the sovereignty figure as a native princess, who represents the land.<sup>292</sup> In Vaughan’s text Glythin is part of the land, extracted from it by Owain as he wins her from the depths of the lake. She is depicted as embodying the landscape:

Her arms were white as the swans all about her; her dress as the flag leaves that blow now green, now silvered; and the sparkle of early morning lit her pale hair. About her shoulders it stirred, more bright than the pollened calyx of a lily; but where it lay awash, like seaweed that sways upon a tide, its faint green matched the stems of the plants under water. Her eyes were neither blue nor green nor grey, for they changed with the lake when sunshine came and went, or ripples darkened its surface. (p. 17)

According to Goetinck, ‘[s]overeignty is depicted as a woman whose marriage to the King symbolises his union with his kingdom’.<sup>293</sup> Owain’s marriage to Glythin is akin to the conquering of territory. As the groom muses: ‘did not his married life lie spread in front of him, plain to read as a map? He saw the whole acreage of enclosure, in which wealth was made sure and beauty held a constant captive’ (pp. 49-50). The very first act of the conqueror is to name his territory. Owain declares ‘I’ll be calling her Glythin

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<sup>291</sup> The chronology of the novel is distorted in Vaughan’s novel, however, which is discussed in greater depth in chapter six of this thesis.

<sup>292</sup> Glenys Goetinck, *Peredur: A Study of Welsh Tradition in the Grail Legends* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975), p. 12. All further references are to this edition. This is also discussed in relation to Gwennllian and Dick’s relationship in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* in chapter four of the thesis.

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid*, p. 129

which is meaning a dewdrop' (p. 47). The next task is to modify his new wife's behaviour to fit his own conventions, assimilating her into his own culture. After much effort, Owain is pleased to report that his 'wife is shaping wonderful well' (p. 90). The subsequent stage of the colonising process is the exploitation of the land and Glythin's own body with which it is closely associated. Surveying the cattle that Glythin has brought as her dowry, Owain asks his mother if she thinks they will 'cross' with his own. She answers:

That they will ... Nature's nature, high and low, you simpleton! A great lusty brindled herd we'll be having soon – butter and cheese and butcher's meat; and young ones o' your own, too. And I shall be their Grannie. And under my own roof they'll bide, the lot of them. Pretty they'll be as her, see, and strong and doing well as you, boy. For doing wonderful well you were, indeed now, with your fanciful singing – you artful dreamer! There's business, after all, to be made by verses, and money to be caught from courting one o' the Fair Tribe. (p. 44)

As well as highlighting the economic and sexual spoils available to the coloniser, the creation of a hybrid race is touched upon. The new hybrid cows and hybrid mortal-fairy race are added to other symbols of hybridity in the novel, such as the iron and gold forged clumsily into one ring, the agricultural land of Owain's race and the wilderness of Glythin's and the Welsh folk tale retold in the English language. Owain and Glythin's relationship is not a straightforward allegory of the colonial experience, of course, since Owain is Welsh. Vaughan's return to a mythologized Welsh past also provides the opportunity to rewrite history, rendering Owain's marriage with Glythin a re-colonisation of Welsh land by the Welshman. It is a recurring theme in Vaughan's novels, as the landscape is also reclaimed by the Welsh in *The Invader*, *Her Father's House* and *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> While in *Iron and Gold* the land is represented by a woman, in *The Invader* it is the landscape that is feminised. This is illustrated as Daniel 'turned and looked upon his house in the gathering dusk, it was to

While *Iron and Gold* provides an opportunity to rewrite colonial history, it nevertheless suggests that the Welsh will repeat the patterns of behaviour that have led to their estrangement from the rural past. Owain's relationship with both Glythin and the land can be read not only as an allegory of the colonial process, but as the industrialisation of the Welsh countryside. At the beginning of the novel Owain is a young bard who roams the mountains, for him, a place of inspiration, spirituality, poetry and home to his muse, the fairy in the lake (p. 17). After their marriage, he abandons his poetry in favour of his new life as a rich farmer whose 'sowing has brought forth a hundredfold' (p. 132). His relationship with the landscape is now solely one of economic exploitation and Owain becomes materialistic:

he was often restless because the more he possessed of this world's goods, the keener grew his appetite for some new treat. The rough clothes he had once worn in content must be bettered and the plain food he used to relish became distasteful. (p. 101)

Similarly, he no longer visits the mountain that reminds him of his young idealism (p. 66).<sup>295</sup> Glythin, representative of the wild landscape, is not part of the economic structure and though she is happy to make butter and cheese 'since she shrank from haggling with other women, it fell to [Owain] to market her wares' (p. 99) at the local market-town.

While Glythin fears iron, Owain uses it to exploit the land:

Quaker grass and the feathery pink flower of sorrel quivered about his knees and ox-eyed daisies swayed in a light wind. At each swish of his scythe, they fell around his feet... (pp. 95-6)

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him as the face of a woman more ardently desired than Mary Anne, more comely than his mother but as old in his affections, a face that had looked kindly on him always since he was a little boy.' (p. 89). In both texts, desire for women and land is interlinked.

<sup>295</sup> This is also seen in the altered geography of his home. Once the focus of the home when he was a bard, the farmer has 'put aside in a corner' his 'small harp' (p. 197). Its significance in the home has been replaced by the space where, 'under his hearth stone, he would bury the guineas' (p. 102).

Owain also brandishes iron as he strikes Glythin three times, signalling the permanent loss not only of his wife, but of his spiritual connection with the land. As Jane Aaron has observed, iron is ‘associated with that industrial development which is represented as darkening the lives of the Bard’s south Walian contemporaries at the opening of the book.’<sup>296</sup> Vaughan’s text suggests the development from Owain’s exploitation of the land to the modern industrialisation that has ravaged it and distanced its inhabitants from their ancient culture.

In a similar manner, though Daniel Evans succeeds in reclaiming Plas Newydd in *The Invader*, instead of an uncomplicated reconnection with land and identity that it seems to represent, it also marks an altered Welsh relationship with the landscape. For Daniel’s house, as we have seen, is no ordinary home:

The houses of his neighbours were whitewashed and but two storeys high. His was of grey stone, and looked as blunt, British and robust as a country gentleman’s house should look that was built in the year of Waterloo. It boasted three storeys and a porch with Doric pillars. (p. 1)

The building is very different from Megan’s whitewashed homestead that blends into the landscape in *A Thing of Nought*. While the latter is an example of Peate’s concept of native architecture, Plas Newydd is an instance of the grand buildings in Wales which ‘are almost without exception English in inspiration’.<sup>297</sup> The house embodies Daniel’s anglicised aspirations. As we have seen, it is ‘an outstanding mark of his gentility’ (p. 1) and wealth, traits inherent in the economic relationship with the land and class structure associated with Englishness and urbanity. Its ‘blunt, British’ appearance and links with ‘Waterloo’ locates the building as part of an English-centred British imperialism and

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<sup>296</sup> Jane Aaron, introduction to Hilda Vaughan, *Iron and Gold* (1948; Dinas Powys: Honno, 2002), pp. vii-xviii (p. xvii).

<sup>297</sup> Peate, *The Welsh House*, p. 4.

Daniel's desire for it incorporates him into a new Britishness that replaces his close spiritual connection with his native land.

While Daniel's reclaiming of Plas Newydd is not a simple reconnection with the Welsh land, nor is the union between Owain and Glythin an uncomplicated remarriage with the soil in *Iron and Gold*. The complexity of identity in colonised lands is fully realised in the failings of Glythin as a straightforward sovereignty figure. Although in many ways Glythin represents the land, she is not Welsh in strictly the same way as the members of the mortal community. Due to her mysterious origins, she is considered 'strange' (p.107) and a 'stranger' (p. 51), and Owain's family and neighbours ostracise her from the community. The text highlights her difference as Glythin sings 'to a foreign stave, words that were not familiar' (p. 90) while soothing her hybrid children to sleep. She is simultaneously of the land and alien to it. There are various references to the perception of the English as a despised 'other' throughout the tale (pp. 8, 72-3, 85). When Owain brings his prospective fairy bride home, however, his mother tells him that they must inform the community that Glythin is English, 'a wealthy bride come here from foreign parts' (p. 43). It seems that there are degrees of 'otherness' that range in their acceptability within the community. The complex positioning of her Welsh and yet not Welsh identity shows how the boundaries of identity are relative and constantly shifting. This is suggested in the location of Owain's home, which is on the margins of the community: '[t]o folk in the river valley, his birthplace was "up yonder"; but for him it was "down here". Living among the mountains, he was used to look heavenward...' (p. 16). In a similar way Daniel Evans' relocation of a few hundred yards, from his home to the next cottage across the valley is a form of dramatic exile. As he explains, the Welsh

are ‘like sheep... only content on the banks where they was reared. Once I was driven from Plas Newydd I was on a strange bank, straying and restless’ (p. 213). His words recall M. Wynn Thomas’ remark that rather than being merely geographical, difference is

infinitely more complex than that, since on the back of this one difference rides a whole host of others – historical, social, cultural, linguistic and so on. In the Welsh context knowing your place can mean a great many things.<sup>298</sup>

A sense of local belonging is strong in Wales and, as such, reconnection with the land is a highly complex process. Welsh identity is plural and, as Glythin’s case emphasises, certainly not straightforward.

Glythin’s identity, located outside the community, enables her to criticise the failings, injustices and mendacity of Welsh society. As we have seen, she points out the negative aspects of agriculture (p. 39) and religion (p. 84). At Owain’s mother’s funeral, Glythin also voices her scorn of the community’s customs as the mourners are ‘called to account for their hypocrisy’ (p. 123). She tells them that they, ‘with... long faces, put on like masks, are learning children to dread that which the angels rejoice over – the going home of a soul’ (p. 121). The small, rural communities in *A Thing of Nought* and *Iron and Gold*, as we saw earlier, are places of cruel gossip. Similarly, the agricultural community in *The Invader* is far from harmonious as neighbours and relatives conduct complex and endless disputes over land. The novel opens with the hero chasing a shepherd who has been ‘coursing’ Daniel’s sheep (pp. 6-10). As Mary Anne remarks, the act of villainy is reciprocal as Daniel ‘[i]s nipping a bit o’ everyone else’s land too, from the way father and his own brothers do carry on against him’ (p. 69). The close Welsh relationship with the land displayed here is not quite as noble as it seems. A review of the novel in the *Western Mail* claimed that ‘Welsh readers will criticise “The Invader” on the

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<sup>298</sup> M. Wynn Thomas, *Internal Difference*, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1992), pp. xi-xii.



score of the unkindly light which it throws on life in rural Wales.<sup>299</sup> A similar sentiment is voiced in a review of *The Battle to the Weak* in the *Weekly Westminster*, which remarks that '[t]he picture of farm life is sombre.'<sup>300</sup> Although Vaughan displays the wholesome life of the countryside as preferable to town-living, she does not idealise the rural community that she affectionately depicts. Vaughan's novels echo the principal theories expounded by anthropologists such as Stapledon and Plaid Cymru's 'Back to the Land' policies, but her own characters' reconnection with rural Wales is not an unquestioning nationalist realignment, nor is the land they recover a rural idyll.

#### IV

The native landscape is certainly not an uncomplicated rural idyll for Welsh women. Their simultaneous construction of identity according to gender and nationality render the relationship between Welsh women and the landscape especially complex. In Vaughan's texts, the symbolic features of Welsh topography have a different resonance for women. This is most evident in the ambivalent portrayal of the homestead. While, as we have seen, it is a place of security and familial love, it is also a site associated with female domestic drudgery and duty. Owain's mother, who we saw earlier bustling about the kitchen, asks her son, '[w]hat has my life been but baking and brewing for men? Don't I gather sticks, and fodder the beasts, and slaughter and clean and cook that you may be fed?' (p. 5). Perhaps understandably, then, Glythin is reluctant to live in the homestead. She expresses her misgivings to Owain, explaining, '[i]t is dark in a house ... And close. The smells are hot and heavy' (p. 42). Her claustrophobic description conveys the stifling oppression of the woman within the home. The restricted movement of women in the

<sup>299</sup> *Western Mail*, August 30<sup>th</sup>, 1928.

<sup>300</sup> *Weekly Westminster*, March 7<sup>th</sup>, 1925.

landscape is also illustrated in *A Thing of Nought*. When Megan Lloyd marries the Methodist preacher, Rees Lloyd, her changed status means that she moves geographically from her home, across the river to the chapel's adjoining cottage. She relocates a matter of yards from one place of duty to another.

While Megan's movements are subject to her relationship with male characters, men are free to roam. The road in *A Thing of Nought* is a significant gendered space. It is a place of mystery for Megan whose gender places the means of escape it offers out of her reach. It becomes almost fetishized to her:

Her gaze was on a point where, at a bend in the valley, the road was lost to sight. Something about that lonely road, leading away into a world she had never seen, fascinated her. She often stood thus, staring. (p. 150)

Her lover, Penry, arrives and departs the valley along this road several times during the narrative and Megan must passively watch while he 'disappeared from sight' (p. 154). Only male characters are allowed the freedom to leave the suffocating constraints of the valley. While Penry voyages as far as Australia, Megan only ever leaves the valley twice: once to visit the fair and later to see the doctor. On both occasions she travels only as far as the next village of Pontnoyadd.

Megan finds solace in the mountains when she hears that her beloved Penry is bound for Australia:

From the time she was a little child the vastness of the hills had brought her comfort in distress. At this moment she could not endure to have them shut out from her sight. (p. 140)

It is significant that she does not actually visit the mountains; they merely provide a psychological retreat. In contrast, Glythin is allowed physically to escape to the mountainside. The wilderness is depicted as an alternative to the male-dominated

community, where its patriarchal values do not operate. Before Owain has married Glythin, he attempts to woo her by offering a loaf of bread. As an inhabitant of the wild countryside, the fairy ‘pitied mortal women who must accept whatever men chose to offer. By no such hunger as theirs was she enslaved’ (p. 23). Following her marriage, Glythin is appalled by her husband and his brothers’ macho talk of revenge and fighting. She escapes to the mountains, telling her husband that, ‘[t]he white flowering trees ... are not ugly with anger’ (p. 80). In the wilderness women are not controlled and can behave as they please:

Under a roof [Glythin] was subdued, less talkative than other women, watchful to serve her husband; but on the open hills where her eyes shone and her hair was blown about, she became gay as a linnet. (p. 62)

As Jane Aaron has pointed out, many examples of Welsh women’s English-language fiction at this time portray female characters who are ‘alienated from the human communities in which they dwell’ and therefore ‘forge “unfathomable friendships” with the natural landscape.’<sup>301</sup> This is a common trope of Vaughan’s texts. Like Glythin and Megan, the mountains are a retreat for Grace in *The Candle and the Light*, Flora in *Pardon and Peace*, Laetitia in *Here Are Lovers* and Nest in *The Curtain Rises*. In *The Battle to the Weak* both Esther and her cousin, Megan, find a new-found freedom by the coast. Here the mountain is substituted by the sea, an important symbol of female freedom.

The lack of rules and constraints that govern the wilderness, however, present it as a lawless and unpredictable location. The mountainside is the site of Owain’s father’s mysterious death. It is a place feared by Owain’s mother, who tells him that ‘there’s magic in them wild heights to rob a woman of her man’ (p. 10). The mountain is

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<sup>301</sup> Jane Aaron, introduction to *A View Across the Valley*, p. x.

primitive, emotional and anarchic and women's link with this realm distances them from the opposing culture and tradition of the male-centred community. This is notable in *Queen of the Rushes* (1906) by Allen Raine, as the crazed and lustful Nance runs away from her husband and farm to roam the moors of Ceredigion.<sup>302</sup> Interestingly, however, Vaughan finds a way to counteract this dichotomy in *Iron and Gold*. Here, the mountainside is a source of an alternative and, as the text suggests, superior culture. The wilderness stirs Owain to sing 'mountainy songs' (p. 11). This inspiring landscape is linked with Glythin, his muse: '[l]acking her he was a common bard, good enough to please the crowd but to himself a failure' (p. 17). The verses are set 'to solemn music, with the sigh in it of wind across lonely spaces' (p. 52) and discuss spiritual questions, such as, '[t]his body o' mine ... what is it but a husk?' (p. 52). The mountain music is not appreciated by the community, however, who demand that Owain play something 'frolicsome' (p. 54) of earthly and fleshly concerns that has them all 'shouting so lustily' (p. 55). The feminised wild landscape and its alternative culture is spiritual and cerebral, in stark contrast with the transient and empty populist culture enjoyed by the inhabitants of the valley below. As such, however, it can only be the product of a solitary rather than a collective identity.

The solitary individual whose relationship with a feminised landscape inspires an artistic endeavour, which is separated from the culture of the masses, has parallels with the positioning of Vaughan's own work. Her rural novels appeared alongside the industrial fiction which dominated the English-language writing of Wales during the early and mid twentieth century. While the identity constructed in these novels is largely male and communal, Vaughan's texts portray agricultural communities from which her

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<sup>302</sup> Allen Raine, *Queen of the Rushes* (1906; Dinas Powys: Honno, 1998).

heroines, and occasionally heroes, are often slightly alienated or dislocated. In his comparison of Vaughan's work with that of Jack Jones and Rhys Davies, G. F. Adam observes that unlike the realist writing of the male novelists, 'none of her novels gives a realistic picture of the region it represents... [they] are not so much interpretations of a region as the result of her own artistic imagination and fantasy.'<sup>303</sup> This is perhaps part of a necessary escape into the margins of the landscape for the Welsh woman writer, who is alienated from the patriarchal centre of the community, as well as the colonial centres of power. Owing also to her diasporic removal to London and America, the Welsh landscape in Vaughan's novels becomes a poignant symbolic site in which the complex national identity of her characters and, indeed, her own Welsh identity is explored. She returned to various locations in Wales to write most of her novels, however, equating the Welsh landscape with the wilderness in *Iron and Gold*, as a place of creative inspiration. For example, in the space of nine months, letters to her husband show that Vaughan was staying at Bwlch in Breconshire in June 1937, Builth Wells in October 1937, and Laugharne in January 1938.<sup>304</sup> Her texts take real places to create highly evocative psychological landscapes such as the claustrophobic valley in which Megan is enclosed in *A Thing of Nought*. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that critics have differed in their ideological positioning of Vaughan's work and its relation to Wales. While Stephen Knight has commented that Vaughan's 'later work moves away from a close concern with modern Wales',<sup>305</sup> Jane Aaron has described one such later novel, *Iron and Gold*, as

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<sup>303</sup> Adam, *Three Contemporary Anglo-Welsh Novelists*, (pp. 78-9)

<sup>304</sup> Letters from Hilda Vaughan to Charles Morgan dated June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1937, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1937, January 31<sup>st</sup>, 1938.

<sup>305</sup> Knight, *A Hundred Years of Fiction*, p. 40.

one of ‘the Welshest’ of her works.<sup>306</sup> In a way both characterisations of Vaughan’s work are correct. Vaughan’s relationship with the land changes as her early life there becomes increasingly remote. While the landscape in her first novel, *The Battle to the Weak*, is primarily a backdrop to the more prominent social concerns, by the later texts Vaughan is looking towards Wales, its landscape and identity rather than from Wales to the larger outside world. Reflecting this changing perception, Hilda Vaughan’s landscapes are a place of constant loss and reconnection, where identity is lost and re-forged, re-inscribed and reinvigorated.

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<sup>306</sup> Jane Aaron, introduction to *Iron and Gold*, p. ix.

## Chapter Six

### **‘Strange memories, not of her own, but of her nation’s past began to stir in her’: Welsh Folklore and Folk Custom in the Novels of Hilda Vaughan**

In his seminal book, *Welsh Folk Customs* (1959), Trefor M. Owen indicates that Welsh folk culture is the product of a particular historical social setting. He explains that in the past:

Local communities did not need to open themselves up to outside influences on a large scale; their way of life was one which turned inwards upon itself, relied on its own resources, and built up a highly integrated community which was isolated socially as well as geographically.<sup>307</sup>

Here, Owen links the development of folk culture with community and communality, a sense of belonging and shared identity that is specific to place and differentiates and separates the people from those outside its cultural and geographic boundaries.<sup>308</sup> What emerges from this description is the important function that folk culture plays, in Wales and elsewhere, in the construction of identity. Folklore and folk customs have played an important part in nationalist and regionalist movements, providing, as Cathy Lynn Preston points out, ‘traditions which help the group to have a sense of group identity.’<sup>309</sup> References to the indigenous customs, tales, rituals, beliefs and superstitions of Wales are woven into many of Vaughan’s novels. Folk culture plays an intrinsic part in the plot of

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<sup>307</sup> Trefor M. Owen, *Welsh Folk Customs* (1959; Llandysul: Gomer, 1994), p. 18. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>308</sup> That is not to imply that Welsh folklore and custom is insular and closed off from other cultures. There are many links between Welsh folk culture and the myths and practices from many other countries as Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson and Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson have proven. See Kenneth Hurlstone Jackson, *The International Popular Tale and Early Welsh Tradition* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961) and Antti Aarne, *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography* translated and enlarged by Stith Thompson (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1961). Jacqueline Simpson also demonstrates how Welsh folklore crosses over the border into Herefordshire. See Jacqueline Simpson, *Folklore of the Welsh Border* (Stroud: Tempus, 2003).

<sup>309</sup> Cathy Lynn Preston, Introduction to *Folklore, Literature and Cultural Theory: Collected Essays* (New York: Garland, 1995), pp. ix-xix (p. xi).

*Iron and Gold* (1948), *Harvest Home* (1936) and *Here Are Lovers* (1926). It also provides a rich but unobtrusive background to *The Battle to the Weak* (1925) and *Her Father's House* (1930). This chapter will explore Vaughan's use of Welsh folk culture to forge an identity in her novels. It will evaluate how this positions the texts, the author and the reader in relation to constructions of the nation, the community and the past.

## I

In 'Perceptions of the Past in Welsh Folklore Studies' Juliette Wood juxtaposes the "folksy" Welshness of the tourist industry, epitomised in the image of the Welsh lady emblazoned on tea towels, with the established scholarly study of Welsh Folklore.<sup>310</sup> This contrast is reminiscent of a passage in *Here Are Lovers* in which Laetitia Wingfield informs her father that she wishes to visit a rock that is believed to possess magical powers. He asks:

'Since when have you begun to interest yourself in the superstitions of the peasantry?'  
He was irritable now. This was yet another piece of blue-stockings folly for which he had to thank her eccentric aunt Olivia...<sup>311</sup>

The English Squire's reaction locates folklore as part of the crude and savage inheritance of the Welsh peasantry, as well as a subject for scholarly study, though he dismisses the merits of either interest. One party, then, is intimately bound up in folklore as it helps to shape their identity, while the other, represented here by the 'blue-stockinged' Aunt Olivia, takes the more detached view of an observer. The passage draws attention to the potential to engage with Welsh folk culture from radically different ideological positions. The Welsh peasant has an 'authentic' relationship with the culture but is in turn a subject

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<sup>310</sup> See Juliette Wood, 'Perceptions of the Past in Welsh Folklore Studies', *Folklore*, vol 108 (1997) 93-102 (93). All further references are to this edition.

<sup>311</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *Here Are Lovers* (New York and London: Harper, 1926), p. 71. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.



for examination by the anthropological folklorist, while in Wood's article folk culture is, in addition, a product to be consumed by the tourist. The three different relationships with folklore mentioned here prompt an examination of Vaughan's own positioning in relation to folk culture in the texts. Vaughan's relationship with folklore seems to have been a source of dispute in contemporary reviews of *Iron and Gold*, a novelistic retelling of the old Welsh folk tale of The Lady of Llyn-y-Fan-Fach. The *Times Literary Supplement* complained that it was told with 'the over-sweetness of the Celtic twilight without its authenticity.'<sup>312</sup> The *South Wales Evening Post*, on the other hand, declared that

[n]o Welsh reader is likely to seek a fairy-tale atmosphere in a legend which has become linked with the origins of the Physicians of Myddfai, descendants of this strange wedding, whose prescriptions at least can still be read to-day. It is for this understanding of the Welsh outlook, expressed in omissions or deletions instead of distortions and caricature, that Wales owes a debt to Hilda Vaughan. She treats these Welsh fantasies as an adult product of an ancient civilisation.<sup>313</sup>

The reviewers cannot agree on Vaughan's authorial relationship with the folklore that she portrays. While in *Here Are Lovers* Laetitia replies that she is 'not a student of folklore' (p. 71) we are led to wonder whether folklore is depicted in Vaughan's work as part of a cultural heritage or as an interesting subject for the enthusiastic outsider.

Hilda Vaughan certainly knew a great deal about Welsh folklore and includes informed details of it in her work. This is evident in her reworking of the legend of the Lady of Llyn-y-Fan-Fach in *Iron and Gold*. According to Juliette Wood, there are three dozen surviving variants of the fairy bride legend in Wales, of which the Llyn-y-Fan version is the most famous.<sup>314</sup> This Welsh oral legend was first written down in English in 1861 by William Rees of Ton and was used by him, as is the case with many fairy

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<sup>312</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, November 13<sup>th</sup>, 1948.

<sup>313</sup> *South Wales Evening Post*, November 27<sup>th</sup>, 1948.

<sup>314</sup> Juliette Wood, 'The Fairy Bride Legend in Wales', *Folklore*, vol 103 (1992) 56-72 (56). All further references are to this edition.

stories, as an origin myth for a family, in this case the Physicians of Myddfai, whose healing powers were renowned.<sup>315</sup> The legend tells of a lake-dwelling fairy who marries a mortal man but lays down conditions that, if broken, will result in her returning to her supernatural home. After many years of marriage, and, crucially to its role as a family origin myth, after the couple have had children, the conditions are broken and the fairy bride returns to her domain. Vaughan's novel shares many of the same features as the Ton version, such as the dowry of white kine described by Owain in *Iron and Gold* as 'of finer breed than he had seen'<sup>316</sup>; in addition, the Welsh verse the fairy sings while calling her cattle back to the lake after the conditions have been broken is translated into English in Vaughan's novel (p. 199).<sup>317</sup> Vaughan also incorporates elements from the Ton version in an adapted form. While the father of the mortal man has been killed in the wars with the English in the Ton text,<sup>318</sup> Vaughan depicts Rhys and Gwilym, Owain's brothers, as in conflict with the English as outlaws (p. 70). In her foreword to *Iron and Gold*, Jane Aaron points out that Vaughan deviates from the Ton version in the conditions that the fairy sets her lover, combining the three blows without cause found in the South Wales version with the North Wales condition that the husband should not hit his wife with

<sup>315</sup> This first English language version, collated, translated and inscribed by William Rees of Ton, Llandovery from John Williams (Ab Ithol), ed., *The Physicians of Myddfai* (1861) is reproduced in an Appendix in Hilda Vaughan, *Iron and Gold*, ed. Jane Aaron (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2002), pp. 206-214.

<sup>316</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *Iron and Gold*, ed. Jane Aaron (1948; Dinas Powys: Honno, 2002), p. 38. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis. See also the Ton version, Appendix to *Iron and Gold*, p. 209.

<sup>317</sup> In the Ton version it is quoted in Welsh as 'Mu wlfrech, Moelfrech, / Mu olfrech, Gwynfrech, / Pedair cae tonn-frech, / Yr hen wynebwen, / A'r las Geingen, / Gyda'r Tarw Gwyn / O lys y Brenin; / A'r llo du bach / Sydd ar y bach / Dere dithau, yn iach adre!' This is translated as, 'Brindled cow, white speckled / Spotted cow, bold freckled, / The four field sward-mottled, / The old white-faced, / And the grey Geingen / With the white Bull / From the court of the King; / And the little black calf / Suspended on the hook, / Come thou also, quite well home!' See Appendix, *Iron and Gold*, p. 212. Vaughan modifies this to, 'Windflower! Snowflake! Dewdrop! Come, bring your milk-white calves! Blossom, and Curd and Lily! My sweet-scented Clover, *fach*! Come, Oxeyed Prince, come lead me back my herd! ... Brindle, *bach*, ... get you down from the hook, quite whole. Come home with me too, little one, whose throat men have slit with their steel.' (p. 199).

<sup>318</sup> See Appendix to *Iron and Gold*, p. 206.

iron.<sup>319</sup> Aaron remarks that this ‘would appear to constitute a deliberate combination’ but rightly points out that there is no solid evidence to prove that Vaughan had researched Welsh folklore: ‘it may be that that, simply, is the tale Vaughan was told’.<sup>320</sup> It is striking, however, just how many variants, absent in the Ton version, Vaughan manages to incorporate into her tale. Another link with the North Wales lake fairy stories is when Owain strikes Glythin, the fairy, with his stirrup ‘in careless haste’ (p.88), which recalls a Llanberis fairy whose husband accidentally struck her with a horse’s bridle.<sup>321</sup> Vaughan’s fairy is often seen swimming with swans (p. 17, 22). As Owain watches her, he sees that ‘[t]he swans were ghost white in the moon’s silvering. She floated out among them, faint as her own reflection upon the dark mirror framed in a ring of hills’ (p. 31). This invites comparisons with the Germanic tales of the fairy bride in which the heroine is a swan but also recalls one version from the Myddfai area, though not mentioned in the Ton version, in which one local farmer insisted that the fairy took the form of a goose.<sup>322</sup> Vaughan is familiar with the traditional belief that fairies ‘neither ate flesh nor fish’ and while her wedding guests feast on meat, Glythin ‘would touch nothing more than a bowl of curds and whey’ (p. 50).<sup>323</sup> In addition, *Iron and Gold* incorporates the gipsy who replaces the fairy bride in some versions and places her instead as a romantic rival.<sup>324</sup> Vaughan’s novel includes details of various Welsh fairy bride stories and incorporates many of these into the text using minor characters who are unlikely to have all featured in the tale she

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<sup>319</sup> Jane Aaron, foreword to *Iron and Gold*, (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2002), p. xii. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>320</sup> Aaron, foreword to *Iron and Gold*, p. xii.

<sup>321</sup> See John Rhys, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1901), p. 35. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>322</sup> Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, p. 16.

<sup>323</sup> See T. Gwynn Jones, *Welsh Folklore and Folk-Custom* (1930; Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1979), p. 55. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>324</sup> Wood, *Folklore* (vol 103), p. 62.

was told. The young Vaughan may have been told an astoundingly rich and full version of the tale but it is much more plausible that she read the many accounts and was indeed a 'student' of Welsh folklore.

Such a view of Vaughan's relationship with Welsh folklore would seem to be supported by comments that she makes in a letter to the author Rosemary Sutcliff. She praises the latter's novel, *Sword at Sunset* (1963) which depicts Arthurian Britain and tells her about her own novel that engages with an ancient legend. She writes:

There is much I long to ask you about the ancient Greek and Celtic curse laid upon incest, the tragic theme of loyalty between two hero friends, destroyed by their love of a woman and, above all, about your *Little Dark People*! Obviously they were the original inhabitants of these islands ... In my part of Wales, the Brecon/ Radnor/ Herefordshire border, legends suggest that the small race, who dreaded iron, may have given rise to the Celtic 'fairy' tales. What is surprising, however, is that in our traditions, 'fairies' – your *Little Dark People* are referred to as 'The Fair Folk'. Soon after this last war, Macmillan's published a novel of mine, the title of which was *IRON AND GOLD*.<sup>325</sup>

Her theory that the fairy stories, such as the Llyn-y-Fan-Fach legend, were derived from the existence of 'little dark people', an aboriginal Welsh race that predated the Celts, is taken from the writings of Welsh Folklore scholars. John Rhys presents this theory in *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx* (1901)<sup>326</sup> and it is developed by W. J. Gruffydd in *Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogion* (1958). Gruffydd argues that:

It is probable that, when the iron-using Celtic invaders became the dominant race, the previous inhabitants, perhaps for a very long time, lived a separate and secluded life of their own in some kind of lake dwelling or isolated and inaccessible parts. Their manner of life and their language were different from the newer Celtic settlers; ... Finally iron was something terrible because it was new

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<sup>325</sup> Letter from Hilda Vaughan to Rosemary Sutcliff, 14<sup>th</sup> Nov, 1963. [Emphasis in the original.] Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>326</sup> See Rhys, *Celtic Folklore*, pp. 664-686. Rhys argues that 'the race of the mound folk, consist[ed] of the short swarthy people variously caricatured in our fairy tales. They formed isolated fractions of a widely spread race possessed of no political significance whatsoever; but, with the inconsistency ever clinging to everything connected with the fairies, the weird and uncanny folk emerging from its underground lairs seem to have exercised on other races a sort of permanent spell of mysteriousness amounting to adoration.' (p. 683).

and was the specific symbol of the invading race. In short, this type of legend preserves a folk-recollection of the aboriginal inhabitants and their impact on the Celtic settlers.<sup>327</sup>

Although this theory was subsequently discredited, Vaughan's letter shows that she was familiar with ideas emanating from scholarship in the field of Welsh folklore and that her own text draws parallels with their contemporary work.

So far, Vaughan's work and correspondence have located her relationship with folklore and the past as largely scholarly. This position and the identity it confers, shifts slightly, on examination of Vaughan's depiction of the beliefs and superstitions of Wales. Juliette Wood comments that in the first stirrings of interest in Welsh folklore in the nineteenth century, 'the romantic impulse was the dominant one. Genres with strong supernatural elements predominated in folklore collections, and the emphasis fell heavily on a numinous and ancient landscape'.<sup>328</sup> Folk beliefs and superstitions helped to shape Shelley's experience of Wales as a destination for the Romantic Gothic tourist when he visited Nantgwillt in Radnorshire. He wrote in 1812 that, 'A ghost haunts this house, which has frequently been seen by the servants. We have several witches in our neighbourhood, and are quite stocked with fairies, and hobgoblins of every description'.<sup>329</sup> His remarks present Wales as a fairyland, with its folklore and superstitions offering much to amuse the outsider. In the early twentieth century, Hilda Vaughan's novels retain much of that Romantic impulse in their copious references to black magic. In *Harvest Home*, for instance, Daniel Hafod is closely linked to witches and witchcraft. He tells his servant, Lizzie, of a witch he knew:

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<sup>327</sup> W. J. Gruffydd, *Folklore and Myth in the Mabinogion* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1958), pp. 12-13. [Emphasis in the original.] All further references are to this edition.

<sup>328</sup> Wood, *Folklore* (vol 108), pp. 97-8.

<sup>329</sup> P. B. Shelley quoted by Roy Palmer in *The Folklore of Radnorshire* (Little Logaston, Herefordshire: Logaston Press, 2001), p. 107. All further references are to this edition.

An ancient old hag she was, used to glean in Uncle's fields. Folks were afeared to refuse her milk or barley meal, lest the witch should put a curse on their cattle. But *me* she took a fancy to... 'There's power in that little lumper's eyes,' she'd say. (p. 141)

Daniel uses his supposed powers to place a curse on the ship carrying his cousin Dan, who is Daniel's rival for the affections of Eiluned:

In the name of the Prince of Darkness he cursed the ship. He willed with a frenzy that tautened all his muscles that she should founder in a gale upon a rocky coast, her timbers be broken, her masts be driftwood on the pitiless waves, her crew perish and their bodies lap in swollen pulp upon the shore... 'I have now set that in motion,' he said, 'which God himself cannot avert.'<sup>330</sup>

In fact, this text, set in the eighteenth century, shares many features with the Romantic Gothic novel. The maniacal Daniel Hafod uses witchcraft in an attempt to seduce Eiluned, the traditional virginal orphan in the Gothic tradition. As his servant, she is almost a captive, locked in a garret at night (p. 24) in this haunted 'ancient place' (p. 30) which echoes with the sounds of 'dead man's laughter' (p. 95). The threat to the pure Eiluned is sexual as well as supernatural as Daniel imagines raping her (p. 76, p. 85). As James Henderson illustrates in 'The Gothic Novel in Wales', Wales was used as a suitably remote location full of 'antiquities and unusual customs' for the Gothic story.<sup>331</sup> He remarks that Matthew Arnold considered the 'Celtic Temperament... admirably suited to figure in... the works of the Gothic novelists'.<sup>332</sup> This idea is replicated in

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<sup>330</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *Harvest Home* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936), p. 112. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis. This curse to bring about the death of another and the association with witchcraft brings to mind the actions of Gwenllian in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* (1932) whose link with the supernatural we saw in chapter one. Gwenllian's spell as she makes a wax doll of her intended victim is repeated in *Iron and Gold* as Owain's mother threatens to cast a spell on an enemy: 'Tallow I'll be taking as I'm moulding candles of; and when 'tis warmed soft, you shall tell me the shape o' this villain. Then I'll form an image o' him...' (p. 77). It is a motif that is repeated yet again, in *Here Are Lovers* when Jane Griffith makes a mud image of the squire who is turning her family out of their farm (p.324). The prevalence of this image of witchcraft, repeated four times in Vaughan's work, displays the preoccupation that the novelist's work has with the ghoulish elements of folk culture.

<sup>331</sup> James Henderson, 'The Gothic Novel in Wales', *The National Library of Wales Journal* 11 (1956-60), 244-54 (244). All further references are to this edition.

<sup>332</sup> Matthew Arnold quoted by Henderson in *The National Library of Wales Journal* 11, p. 244.

Vaughan's text as Daniel's nationality is used to explain his necromancy: '[h]e came of a race that lived not by bread alone, but in the ecstasy or madness of God and Devil' (p. 112). Vaughan's use of Welsh folk customs and superstitions here, locating Wales and the Welsh past as remote, uncanny and on the periphery of 'normal' experience, seems to cater for an outside audience. The view of Welsh folk culture transfers from the scholarly to the touristic.

Further examples of the fantastical and grotesque manifestations of folklore in Vaughan's work are seen in *Harvest Home*. Here, the household at Great House assemble around the fire to discuss omens:

One evening, in the kitchen, some neighbours who had called were discussing portents of death. Lizzie's face blanched and Mistress Hafod heaped fuel on the fire, glancing uneasily behind her into the shadowy recesses of the room. One told tales of the night hag, seen only when some member of an ancient family was about to die; another of the Tolaeth, or spirit knockings, that betokened the decease of humbler folk. They spoke of corpse candles, of church bells tolled by no human hand, of the bird that cried 'Dewch! Dewch,' alighting on the roof, and of the spectral dog, white for a saved soul, black for the damned, slinking up to the abode of the dying. (p. 132)

To this list of phenomena the shepherd, Timothy, adds his tale of the 'Cyhyraeth,' a wailing sound heard before the wrecking of a ship (p. 133). In this single passage we have a catalogue of the grim and the grotesque of Welsh folklore. Vaughan's attention to detail displays a thorough knowledge of the field. Death omens appear in several of Vaughan's novels and the corpse candle is referred to again in *Here Are Lovers* (p. 260). The corpse candle was a greenish light which, if seen, alerted the viewer that death was imminent. It is one of the most well known of the Welsh death portents and, as Catrin Stevens remarks in *Cligieth, C'nebrwn ac Angladd* (1987), it was thought to originate with Saint David, according to some, while others claimed it was the legacy of Bishop

Robert Ferrar who was martyred in 1555 for his Protestantism and wanted others to be forewarned of their death.<sup>333</sup> The corpse candle is referred to in other Anglophone Welsh fiction, such as, *A Welsh Singer* (1896) by Allen Raine<sup>334</sup> and ‘Be This Her Memorial’ in *My People* (1915) by Caradoc Evans.<sup>335</sup> While this connection would seem to locate Vaughan’s portrayal of Welsh folk culture within the emerging tradition of Anglo-Welsh writing, it also links her work with that of writers who, in their very different portrayals of Welsh life, were criticised for pandering to an English audience.<sup>336</sup>

Another superstition found in many Welsh novels and particularly prevalent in Vaughan’s work is love divination. As Halloween draws closer in *Harvest Home*, Dame Hafod remarks to her servant maids,

‘‘twill be upon us next week. You gels ‘ull want to sit up late playing games to see who your husbands are to be.’ Gladys Ann and Megan began to giggle; and the talk turned to methods of divination by means of roasted nuts, molten lead and apple parings. (p. 245)

The practice of throwing unbroken ribbons of apple peel over the shoulder to see the initial of a future husband’s name is also referred to in *Iron and Gold* (p. 2) and *Her Father’s House*.<sup>337</sup> The superstition had previously appeared in Anne Beale’s *Traits and Stories of the Welsh Peasantry* (1849):

Rachel threw the apple-paring over her left shoulder, and everyone rose to see what shape it would assume. It was an extraordinary hieroglyphic, but some declared it one letter and some another, the majority deciding in favour of W... I cannot permit myself to any more such details, but some threw As, some Os and

<sup>333</sup> Catrin Stevens, *Cligieth, C’nebrwn ac Angladd* (Llanrwst: Carreg Gwalch, 1987), p. 9.

<sup>334</sup> Allen Raine, *A Welsh Singer* (London: Hutchinson, 1897).

<sup>335</sup> Caradoc Evans, *My People* (1915; Bridgend: Seren, 2003).

<sup>336</sup> For example, Ernest Rhys in ‘Welsh Notes’ in the *Manchester Guardian* November, 1926, writes: ‘I can rarely read English novels about Wales without impatience. In Allen Raine’s time the sickly-sweet convention was to the fore, and she and William Edwards Tirebuck, and one or two others, wrote of a sentimental land and people that never existed. Mr. Caradoc Evans, at a later date, did much the same thing, the only difference being that this sentimentality is inverted.’

<sup>337</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *Her Father’s House* (London: William Heinemann, 1930), p. 138. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.



others Cs; and some wondered what names X and Y could stand for, and were assured by Polly that those who got such out-of-the-way letters would never marry at all.<sup>338</sup>

As the title of Beale's text suggests, this superstitious game is a trait of Welsh peasant girls and appears as a quaint scene for a largely English audience. It offers picturesque cultural tourism and the prevalence of the more phantasmagorical elements of Welsh folklore and custom in Vaughan's work could position her in a similar sympathetic yet detached viewpoint.

The plot of *Harvest Home* is centred on another Halloween superstition, slightly adapted for Vaughan's purpose. In a bid to win the hand of Eiluned, who is faithfully betrothed to his cousin, Daniel Hafod plots to use an old Welsh tradition to trick her into believing that her lover is dead and that she is free to marry him instead. His idea stems from a conversation with the old shepherd, Timothy, who tells him:

I mind the time when folks as had the courage 'ould go into Abercoran Church just before midnight on Nosclyngiaf. When the clock in the tower struck twelve, 'twas thought they'd hear the names o' those belonging to the parish as had died within the year. Called out they were in a loud ghostly voice. (p. 244)

Dame Hafod points out that usually the tradition states that it is 'them about to die' whose names are heard but Timothy tells her that 'that were the strange thing about Abercoran Church ... Some said 'twas on account o' the parish being full o' seafaring men. God's way, it was, they fancied, o' letting their kindred know who had perished in foreign parts' (p. 244). Daniel lures Eiluned to the church so that she will hear him call out her lover's name but before he can do so he hears his own name called instead and, sure enough, he dies moments later. This superstition was prevalent in many parts of Wales and is also the basis for the plot of a short story by Jeanette Marks entitled 'An All-Hallows'

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<sup>338</sup> Anne Beale, *Traits and Stories of the Welsh Peasantry* (London: George Routledge and Co., 1849), pp. 86-7.

Honeymoon' (1909), in which the tradition helps to reunite a disputing couple.<sup>339</sup> G. F.

Adam, who corresponded with Vaughan while writing about her work, claims that:

The origin of the plot is a legend of an old church in Glamorgan, where at midnight of All Hallows young girls can see their future husbands through the keyhole on the porch. Hilda Vaughan, knowing it from a holiday spent in the neighbourhood, has made this church the centre of her construction and woven the story around it.<sup>340</sup>

As we saw in chapter five, Vaughan travelled to various parts of Wales where she wrote her novels. Adam's assertion would seem to position her as a roving anthropological folklorist, collecting customs and traditions from various parts of Wales, recording them and adapting them for her work. This would also seem to suggest that Vaughan's interest in Welsh folklore was part of a reconnection with her sense of national identity as she physically and imaginatively revisited Wales after her diasporic removal to London and America. Vaughan is quoted as saying, 'I know this life [i.e. the Welsh] more intimately than any other, and I am anxious to record the old ways and types which are fast vanishing before the levelling influences of universal education, easy transportation, and wireless.'<sup>341</sup> Vaughan, it seems, perceived her own role in relation to folk culture as one of responsibility. The comment positions her writing as an act of conservation, a social and cultural duty to rescue the Welsh past from obscurity. It is a role comparable with that assumed by the Welsh language writer, Gwyneth Vaughan, in her novel *O Gorlannau y Defaid* ('From the Sheepfolds', 1905) and would imply that Welsh women

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<sup>339</sup> Jeanette Marks, 'An All-Hallows' Honeymoon', *A View Across the Valley: Short Stories by Women From Wales, c. 1850-1950*, ed. Jane Aaron (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2002), pp. 59-69.

<sup>340</sup> G.F. Adam, *Three Contemporary Anglo-Welsh Novelists: Jack Jones, Rhys Davies and Hilda Vaughan* (Bern, Switzerland: A. Francke AG., 1950), p. 96.

<sup>341</sup> Hilda Vaughan quoted in *Twentieth Century Authors: A Biographical Dictionary of Modern Literature*, eds. Stanley J. Kunitz and Howard Haycraft (New York: W. H. Wilson, 1942), pp. 1450-1451 (p. 1451).

writers in both languages shared this concern to chronicle a traditional way of life in their work.<sup>342</sup>

The depiction of Daniel Hafod's death, however, also bears a striking resemblance to a Radnorshire tale with which Vaughan may well have been familiar. Essex Hope gives an account of a story recorded in the unpublished papers of her uncle, the famous Radnorshire diarist, the Reverend Kilvert. The tale tells of a Clyro man who, following the tradition, went to the Church every Halloween to hear the names read out: '[he] did this for many years with impunity, until one Llanhallant Eve he heard his own name, and was so much upset that he went home and died immediately'.<sup>343</sup> In her autobiographical essay, 'A Country Childhood', Hilda Vaughan shows a keen awareness of the history of her native surroundings, recording rhymes and stories from her locality.<sup>344</sup> In fact, much of the folklore and folk custom found in Vaughan's novels has links to the author's immediate surroundings. Glythin, the fairy-heroine of *Iron and Gold* may not be simply the product of Vaughan's imagination applied to the Llyn-y-Fan-Fach legend. There are other sources that suggest that Vaughan used a number of more local influences to create her heroine. In her letter to Rosemary Sutcliff, Vaughan writes that the tale of Llyn-y-Fan-Fach had links with sources closer to home: 'traces of the lake dweller have been found in Llangorse Lake not so very far from the Vans'.<sup>345</sup> Indeed, many lakes in her neighbouring Radnorshire have links with fairies. Roy Palmer writes that Llyn Cawr near Aberedw Hill is the site of a tragedy where a fairy's mortal lover

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<sup>342</sup> Gwyneth Vaughan, *O Gorlannau y Defaid* (Caerfyrddin: W. Spurrell a'i Fab, 1905).

<sup>343</sup> Essex Hope, *Radnorshire Legends and Superstitions Compiled in 1921 from MS left by the late Reverend R. F. Kilvert, M.A., by his niece, Essex Smith* (Hereford: The Kilvert Society, 1967), p. 23.

<sup>344</sup> Hilda Vaughan, 'A Country Childhood', *The Radnorshire Society Transactions*, (1982) 9-18.

<sup>345</sup> Letter from Hilda Vaughan to Rosemary Sutcliff, 14<sup>th</sup> November, 1963. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

was killed but that they were reunited again as ‘water spirits’.<sup>346</sup> This is reminiscent of *Iron and Gold* which suggests that death will reunite the couple in another realm. Palmer also identifies Llyn Gwyn, south-east of Rhayader as ‘called after Gwyn ap Nudd, warrior, hunter and ruler of Annwn (the underworld) in the time of King Arthur’ and, of course, King of the Tylwyth Teg or the Fair Tribe. It was also believed to be inhabited by a beautiful maiden.<sup>347</sup> Much more suggestive of the character of Glythin, however, is a ballad pasted to the door of a cupboard in a farm called Coedmyrnach in the Elan valley, which was discovered by R. Steadman Lewis. The ballad proclaims itself to be the work of Amgeiniad Ellan, ‘a minstrel of a beautiful and secluded valley in South Wales’ and was written ‘to commemorate the birth of a daughter of the mountains on the 15<sup>th</sup> October, 1877, who was named “Gwlithyn,” or “The Dewdrop”’.<sup>348</sup> The ballad begins in praise of a fairy: ‘On the banks of the Ellan, / Away from the sea, / Comes the fairy Gwlithyn, / To stay with me.’<sup>349</sup> There is no evidence to suggest that Vaughan visited the farm, although her work for the Women’s Land Army makes it an intriguing possibility, nor is there much information on the ballad’s author. However, the geographical proximity of another fairy named after the Welsh word for dewdrop, misspelled by Vaughan as ‘Glythin,’ suggests that Vaughan was influenced by the ballad which had perhaps been displayed in many locations in the area at that time, or that it reached her as it was recounted by others.

In a similar manner, the ‘wishing chair’ pivotal to the plot of *Here Are Lovers* bears a strong resemblance to a feature of the landscape in Radnorshire and the customs

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<sup>346</sup> Palmer, *The Folklore of Radnorshire*, p. 9.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid, p. 9.

<sup>348</sup> See R. Steadman Lewis, ‘This Cupboard is not Bare’, *Radnorshire Society Transactions*, 35 (1965) 51-4 (54). All further references to this edition.

<sup>349</sup> Amgeiniad Ellan quoted by Lewis, *Radnorshire Society Transactions*, p. 54.

that surrounded it. The 'wishing chair' in the novel is to be found down by a river that divides the valley. Gronwy describes it as 'like a throne hewn out of the rock by no human hand. 'Tis told by the old folks as whoever do sit in it and wish, tellin' their wish to none, shall have it come true' (p. 78). It is here that the forbidden lovers, Gronwy Griffith and Laetitia Wingfield, make a wish early on in their relationship and also where they commit suicide at the end of the novel. The geographical feature and its attendant customs and superstitions are reminiscent of a Radnorshire phenomenon described by William Hatfield in 1947. Hatfield recalls a wooded outcrop called Craig-y-don:

It consists of a huge, stupendous rock containing a very capacious chasm, and watered by a clear and murmuring stream coming from the hill above. Hither the young people of Knighton were wont, till of late years, to resort on Sunday evenings, to drink the water of this pellucid spring, sweetened with sugar, and to hold social and friendly converse with each other. . . the rock was known as Devil's Chair.<sup>350</sup>

Roy Palmer comments that this occurred at two other Radnorshire locations as well and that at St Mary's Well near Rhayader 'a belief persisted that the well could bring young couples good luck.'<sup>351</sup> The link here between a rock seat, water and magical powers especially potent for young couples is transplanted into Vaughan's tale. It seems probable that Vaughan draws heavily on the folklore and custom of her local area to furnish her novels with plot and character, engaging with Welsh folklore as part of a cultural inheritance as well as a subject for scholarly study.

Vaughan clearly locates herself within the history of Wales in her letter to

Rosemary Sutcliff. She writes that the 'little dark people' were:

supplanted by the tall red-headed Celtic breed to which *I myself belong*. Do you believe that *we* Celts were of the same stock as the Ancient Greeks who enslaved

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<sup>350</sup> William Hatfield quoted in Palmer, *The Folklore of Radnorshire*, p. 11

<sup>351</sup> Palmer, *The Folklore of Radnorshire*, p. 12.

the little “Helot” inhabitants of Greece? *Our* legends are strangely familiar; and language is often acquired from people of quite different blood.<sup>352</sup> [My emphasis.]

In this letter Vaughan’s interest in Welsh folklore and its manifestation in her novel, *Iron and Gold*, is juxtaposed with references to her own ancestry. Her cultural heritage is positioned alongside her familial heritage. Vaughan’s unpublished autobiographical writings show that she was tantalized by her elusive link with the Welsh past. In notes about her father, she complains that despite her enthusiasm to learn about the Vaughan family, ‘[n]othing would induce Dad to talk of old ancient family history.’<sup>353</sup> Her correspondence shows that the novelist was trying to reconnect with this ‘lost’ Welsh past. Personal papers bear testament to Vaughan’s endeavour to construct a family tree that would link her to the aristocratic Vaughans of Tretower, a preoccupation which is transplanted into the novel *Her Father’s House* in Nell’s discovery that she is descended from the Tretowers.<sup>354</sup> As a descendant of this old Welsh family, Vaughan could also claim a closer relationship with Welsh culture. F. G. Payne explains that the Vaughan families were renowned because they continued to foster Welsh culture as they ‘gave hospitality to many wandering bards of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and the record remains in the manuscripts of the period – in eulogy and elegy, begging-petition and pedigree.’<sup>355</sup> A letter from Vaughan to Charles Morgan in 1937 shows that her efforts to trace some of the family had been fruitful, as she describes a meeting with distant relatives:

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<sup>352</sup> Letter from Hilda Vaughan to Rosemary Sutcliff, dated 14<sup>th</sup> November, 1963. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>353</sup> Hilda Vaughan, in unfinished and unpublished autobiographical writings. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>354</sup> This is explored in greater depth in the previous chapter.

<sup>355</sup> F. G. Payne, ‘Radnorshire bards and their patrons’, *Radnorshire Society Transactions* (1938), 4-17 (8).

Tilly took me to a sale at the remotest little hill farm in my ancestral district ... where I was greeted cheerfully by hosts of bastard cousins – descendants of the naughty (and prolific!) beautiful daughter of the Squire – Parson – Elizabeth Vaughan. She was all *much* too amusing and Welsh to be embarrassing! And they are such odd and agreeable – almost 18<sup>th</sup> century – country folk – that I should enjoy settling among them, at least during the summer holidays.<sup>356</sup>

Similarly, an interview in the *Boston Evening Transcript* in 1935 under the heading ‘Hilda Vaughan in her Thamesian home,’ shows that Vaughan was keen to locate her position in relation to her ancestral past. The article remarks that, though Vaughan is ‘not a direct descendant of Henry Vaughan, the noted seventeenth century poet, she is proud to count him as a kinsman, more proud of him than of the nearer ancestor who saved the king’s life at Agincourt.’<sup>357</sup> Although Vaughan’s relationship with folklore veers between that of the scholar, the cultural tourist and the more ‘authenticated’ inheritor of Welsh culture, perhaps Vaughan’s copious references to Welsh folk culture in her novels can be read as a textual search for her lost Welsh past; a cultural search for identity alongside her literal reconnection with her Welsh roots.

This sympathetic attempt to identify with the Welsh past can be seen as Vaughan invests as much interest in the commonplace manifestations of folk culture as in its more magical and Romantic elements. Trevor M. Owen has remarked that ‘[m]any Welsh customs are grounded in a farming tradition which has evolved over many centuries and which was governed by the opportunities offered by the physical environment’.<sup>358</sup> The customs of farm life feature heavily in Vaughan’s novels. In *Her Father’s House*, Bella Tretower is invited to help in a neighbour’s shearing. The agricultural labour is followed

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<sup>356</sup> Letter from Hilda Vaughan to Charles Morgan, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1937. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>357</sup> ‘Hilda Vaughan in her Thamesian home: A visit with a young English novelist who is rapidly acquiring an international fame’, *Boston Evening Transcript*, May 11th, 1935.

<sup>358</sup> Trevor M. Owen, *The Customs and Traditions of Wales: A Pocket Guide* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000), p. 1. All further references are to this edition.

by a traditional great feast with drinking, music and dancing. The importance of the communal meal that accompanied the work is suggested as Bella tells her sister that ‘[o]n shearing day... there had been cauldrons full of potatoes and a rice pudding “as big as a bran-mash you’d give a cow”’ (p. 104). The significance attached to the folk custom is emphasised in *Harvest Home* as we are told that, ‘[o]n the great day of shearing... Mistress Hafod was in her glory, serving meat and drink to her neighbours, who came to help’ (p.76). *Here Are Lovers* conveys the respite that folk customs offered from a life of hard work: ‘The afternoon was oppressively hot, but the promise of supper, with cider in abundance, and of the singing and love making that should follow it, kept them blithely at their toil’ (p. 138). Christenings, marriages and funerals are also the ritualised customs of everyday life and also provide a rich background to many of the texts. *Iron and Gold* features a Christening (p. 84), and funerals, which will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter, are described in *The Battle to the Weak*, *Iron and Gold* and *Harvest Home*. Many weddings also take place in Vaughan’s novels and marriage customs are frequently described, especially the marriage by contest and pursuit (See *Harvest Home* p. 156 and *Iron and Gold* p. 175). *Harvest Home* features a bard who comes to Great House as a bidder (p. 148). The bidder was a person who invited the neighbours of a couple that were to wed to a bidding in which gifts or money were given to help the couple begin married life.<sup>359</sup> The couple would later be expected to give gifts of the same value to those who had attended their bidding when they were to marry. The tradition is explained as Daniel’s aunt entreates him to marry his female cousin, telling him: ‘what lavish gifts the family made at all wedding biddings in the district. “When one o’ my gels do marry,” she had declared, looking at him significantly, “our neighbours ’ull

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<sup>359</sup> See Owen, *The Customs and Traditions of Wales*, p. 40.



be forced to return those gifts in kind. Plenty to stock her bridegroom's larder for a year, she'll bring him. And furniture, and fine linen, too'" (p. 80). Here, Vaughan depicts the essential social function of the folk custom rather than its picturesque display.

Similarly, the setting for the more domestic aspects of folk culture can be found in Vaughan's novels. As Trevor M. Owen observes, much of Welsh folklore and custom, especially in the winter, was conducted in front of the hearth. He quotes an account of a nineteenth-century Eifionydd family as they 'spent' or 'kept' the evening (*cadw dechreunos*), while working in front of the fire:

For two hours after supper there would be three spinning-wheels at work, and the three daughters were very skilled at spinning with them. The old women would knit stockings and the old man would relate stories to his friends...<sup>360</sup>

A similar scene is portrayed in *Harvest Home* as Daniel watches the group assembled in the kitchen of Great House. In front of the fire we see that:

Shepherd Timothy, with hands like a gnome's, was whittling away at the staff of a sheep's crook. Isaac the Parish, so called because he had been reared by charity, sat splitting hazel wands with which to plait a whisket. Luke the Ploughman, with his sober gaze fixed upon Lizzie, leaned on the settle and turned her spinning-wheel with a stick thrust between its spokes. Lizzie, at her big Welsh wheel, stood up to spin. She was rocking rhythmically from foot to foot and crooning a lullaby. (p. 25)

It was at the hearth, too, that we saw the same characters telling ghost stories and discussing superstitions earlier in the chapter. The strong link between everyday working life and folklore and custom is displayed here as the characters work at their crafts while singing or telling stories. Folk culture, in this scene, is firmly established as belonging to the Welsh rural people as it is something that they are engaging with in their own home, rather than performing for the benefit of an outside viewer. The specificity of this

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<sup>360</sup> An extract from *Cymru*, 28 (1905), 261-4, quoted and translated by Owen in *The Customs and Traditions of Wales*, p. 36.

particular folk culture to rural Wales is reinforced later in the novel as Daniel recalls the tale of a witch who was struck down in Church. He represses his fear, declaring ‘I’ve lived too long in Bristol City to be scared like a child’ (p. 116). He makes it clear that the Welsh folk beliefs are not part of English urban life. He also informs his household that in Bristol Halloween is celebrated differently, as ‘they’re not keeping it the same as we are’ (p. 243). In a manner that recalls Owen’s comment in the introduction to this chapter, Vaughan shows how Welsh folk custom constructs an identity that separates it from outside cultures. Despite its emphasis on difference, however, this use of folk culture can be compared with that of English novelists such as Thomas Hardy, who used folk customs that often have parallels with those found in Wales, but did so to provide authenticity and specificity to the setting of his work.<sup>361</sup> Vaughan replicates Hardy’s use of folk culture but the identity she creates for her novels is unequivocally Welsh.

In fact, *Here Are Lovers* goes even further than this. Not only does it show how Welsh folk culture creates a strong Welsh identity but, in its portrayal of the predicament faced by Gronwy Griffith and Laetitia Wingfield, also shows the detrimental effect that an experience of other cultures can have on a sense of belonging. Gronwy is from a very poor, uneducated peasant family, but he has scholarly leanings and is fond of Shakespeare, Ancient Greek and Roman mythology. When Gronwy tells his brother that his ideal woman is ‘Helen, the daughter of Zeus, for whom Paris and Menelaus strove and Troy was burned’ (p. 27), Peter, replies, ‘I never heard tell of any o’ them folks in these parts’ (p. 27). Gronwy’s learning has led him to mix his knowledge of Welsh folklore with that of ancient Greece, Rome and England while his family are aware only

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<sup>361</sup> For example, in *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* Hardy portrays the May-day dance and discusses its pagan roots. Thomas Hardy, *Tess of the D’Urbervilles* (1891; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 19.

of Welsh folk tales and the Bible. Gronwy's familiarity with outside culture distances

him from his family, as is evident when he reads *Romeo and Juliet* to them:

Gronwy, with his fingers among the pages of the book, looked at the little group as a lonely man might look at the upturned faces of his dogs, grateful for their company but saddened by its incompleteness, wishing that they might understand the language he spoke. (p. 9)

Engaging with other cultures cuts him off from the community and renders his identity questionable. After he finishes his reading he is 'recalled... to his own world' (p. 10), indicating the extent of his alienation. There is a sense that there are many clashing worlds and cultural identities in existence in the novel. While Gronwy favours the Classics, Laetitia is an enthusiast of Romantic literature. We see her as '[s]he murmured inaudibly the opening lines of a favourite poem – 'I wandered lonely as a cloud' (p. 38). She enjoys the work of Byron and Shelley (p. 54) as well as 'Ancient Celtic mystery and romance' (p. 68). The mixture of English and Welsh in Laetitia's reading habits is reflected in her identity. Laetitia's maid explains that '[i]f her father is a dry-faced old Englishman without a civil word for no one, she is Welsh on her mother's side whatever' (p. 17). She is reminiscent of the heroine of Anne Beale's *Rose Mervyn of Whitelake* (1879), whose hybrid identity is resolved after she chooses a suitor from two rivals, one English, the other Welsh.<sup>362</sup> In Vaughan's text, however, there is no such 'happy' resolution; instead, the effect of this hybridity is a crisis of identity. Laetitia's multi-faceted and confused identity is fragmented and unstable. She is described by Gronwy as a 'bewitched princess in the fairy tale' (p. 185), Helen of Troy (p. 59), and, 'no fairy but the squire's daughter' (p. 58), while Laetitia herself imagines 'that she must look like the escaping princess of some fairy-tale' (p. 69) and that her visit to the wishing chair 'would

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<sup>362</sup> Anne Beale, *Rose Mervyn: A Tale of the Rebecca Riots* (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1879).

provide an adventure of which she herself would be the heroine' (p. 68). Unable to reconcile their fragmented identities with their real lives, Gronwy and Laetitia commit suicide at the end of the novel. *Here Are Lovers* would seem to call for a sort of cultural purity as it warns against the unsettling effect that conflicting cultures can have on a unified identity.

Further cultural clashes are seen as Vaughan highlights the tensions caused when the folk customs of the Welsh are judged by an outside culture. This is most evident in the novels' depiction of night courting, otherwise known as '*caru yn y gwely*', or 'bundling'. The custom was condemned by the English government-sponsored Blue Books Report of 1847 which objected to the 'want of chastity' found in Welsh women in particular.<sup>363</sup> *Here are Lovers* reflects English disapproval as Squire Wingfield describes night courting as a 'disgraceful custom' (p. 271), while Susan explains to Laetitia that the housekeeper will not allow her servants to practice it, as, 'you see she's English is Mrs. Smith, and she doesn't hold with the local Welsh custom ... night courtin'' (p. 43). In this novel the custom divides the English and Welsh characters and Laetitia describes the cultural clash as 'A little tragedy ... of two races and two traditions' (p. 44). This old courting custom is portrayed frequently in Vaughan's texts, such as *Here Are Lovers*, *Her Father's House*, *The Invader*, *Harvest Home* and *The Battle to the Weak*. Night courting also features in Rhys Davies' *The Black Venus* (1944), in which the young heroine is put on trial by the village elders for her courting practice and defends it eloquently and with spirit.<sup>364</sup> Hilda Vaughan, in a less provocative way, can be seen to deliberate on the tradition in her work. On the whole, most of Vaughan's 'good', moral and upstanding

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<sup>363</sup> Reverend William Jones of Nefyn in *Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of Education in Wales*, 1847, iii, 67-8. All further references are to this text.

<sup>364</sup> Rhys Davies, *The Black Venus* (London: William Heinemann, 1944).

heroines do not indulge in the custom. Many, like Nell Tretower in *Her Father's House*, are horrified by the prospect. When her sister, Bella, confides in Nell of her amorous escapades, Nell cries, '[y]ou never went night-courting, I hope ... not after all you've heard our ministers and all the elders say against it?' (p. 105) Nell's words refer to the enormous efforts undertaken by the Nonconformist community to discontinue the custom after the practice was linked with the faith in the 1847 Report. For example, the Reverend John Price of Bleddfa claimed that many cases of bastardy were caused by 'the bad habit of holding meetings at dissenting chapels or farmhouses after night, where the youth of both sexes attend for the purpose of walking home together.'<sup>365</sup> Moreover, the disastrous effects of night courting are seen as those who practice it fall pregnant in Vaughan's texts. Both Bella in *Her Father's House* (p. 107) and Megan in *The Battle to the Weak* must admit that they are 'in the way' (p. 182). While Vaughan displays the potential perils of night courting, however, she also shows how it can be done sensibly. Elizabeth in *Here Are Lovers* stands out as a female protagonist esteemed by other characters and the narrative alike, while also practising night courting. Peter, her lover, follows all the traits of the tradition. While the household is asleep (p. 155), 'he stole downstairs carrying his boots in his hand' (p. 155),<sup>366</sup> he throws gravel at her bedroom window and must wait while 'she was making herself into the formless bundle of clothing which propriety required of a modest girl who received her lovers by night' (p. 157). When practised with caution, night courting is portrayed as perfectly honourable. Even when it is not, Vaughan's novels are not condemning of the offender. Despite her illegitimate pregnancy, Megan is a very endearing character in the novel. When she tells Rhys that

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<sup>365</sup> *Report*, ii, 61.

<sup>366</sup> See Catrin Stevens, *Arferion Caru* (Llandysul: Gomer, 1977).

she has had illegitimate children with her lover, Tom Pugh, his response presents the deed as a selfless act of love. He replies: 'I'm thinking you rather splendid in your own way, Megan. You gave yourself to him again without a thought of the consequences to yourself' (p. 211). Vaughan provides a sensitive defence of the Welsh custom against the prejudice, or misunderstanding, of outside views, which suggests an empathetic identification with her Welsh characters.

Moreover, Vaughan's work contains references that suggest its part within an ancient cultural inheritance, which passes on the traditions of Welsh folklore. While *Iron and Gold* imparts the story of the lady of Llyn-y-Fan-Fach to a new generation, *Harvest Home* can also be read as continuing in the folkloric tradition since it follows its conventions. Daniel Hafod is himself a mythical figure, who has 'a giant's foreboding shadow' (p. 10). His rise and fall is told within a structure that harks back to ancient tales. The story is cyclical, beginning and ending with the hero seeing an ill omen that has ramifications for the Welsh nation. Daniel, at the beginning of the story, and Dan, who inherits his name, his property, and potentially his fate, see a red-haired girl and the former muses that it was a redhead 'who betrayed the last Prince of Wales' (p. 10). The story is also tripartite, mirroring the structure of ancient oral tales that had to be easily remembered by their narrator. The three parts, 'Seed-Time', 'The Wheat and the Tares' and 'Reaping', emphasise man's seasonal relationship with the land. They recall the importance of the 'segments of the seasonal cycle, focusing on the advent or absence of regenerative force' found in *The Mabinogion*, according to Jeffrey Gantz.<sup>367</sup> A similar emphasis can be seen in *Iron and Gold*, in which the main body of this story is divided into 'Spring', 'Summer', 'Autumn', and 'Winter', as is appropriate to this retelling of an

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<sup>367</sup> Jeffrey Gantz, introduction to *The Mabinogion* (London: Penguin, 1976), pp. 9-34 (p. 16).

ancient folktale. *Harvest Home* also alludes to *The Mabinogion* as Daniel recounts the story of Blodeuwedd from *Math Son of Mathonwy* (p. 141). Important themes from the ancient grouping of tales also emerge in the text. Daniel Hafod is proud of his reputation for hospitality:

If the Hafods of those barbarous days could keep a well-stocked larder and goose-feather beds of the best, Daniel, too, would show the neighbours who was the leader among them. Under his rule, the home-brewed ale and methgelin should grow even more famous than in the past, and ancient hospitality never be suffered to decline. (p. 12)

The ‘ancient hospitality’ he endeavours to continue is an important tradition displayed in the great feasts and festivals described in *Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed*, as Pwyll feasts in Anwfn with its King, and *Branwen Daughter of Llŷr* as the Welsh go to great pains to extend hospitality to the visiting Irish ruler. Vaughan’s work is located within a larger ancient Welsh tradition that can be read as an endeavour to reassert her Welsh identity. Vaughan is partially removed from an uncomplicated Welsh identity by her elevated class position and the anglicisation this implies, as well as her diasporic removal to London and America. It is significant that the novels that feature folk culture most prominently, *Harvest Home* and *Iron and Gold*, were written long after she had moved away from Wales, the latter being written from a position of reluctant exile in America. With the texts’ identification with Welsh folk culture as part of their inherited tradition, however, Vaughan firmly re-inscribes her texts and indeed her own identity with an ‘authenticated’ Welshness.

## II

Mark E. Workman states that one of the ‘root metaphors’ of folklore ‘is the concept of community’.<sup>368</sup> *The Battle to the Weak* displays the intrinsic role that folklore plays in constructing a sense of community. This is especially the case in the rural, agricultural setting it portrays, in which folk traditions provide an essential social function. Megan recalls that ‘the only day’s outing she had enjoyed for the past few months... had been the wedding of a neighbour’ (p. 119). It is on such ritualised occasions that the community is united as ‘the elderly and married people sat within doors drinking innumerable cups of tea’ and ‘the boys and girls played games in the meadow in front of the house’ (p. 119). The gathering allows an opportunity for the gossip and stories of the locality to be spread and encourages bonds to form between its members. Megan meets her lover, Tom Pugh, at the wedding during a traditional game of ‘Bobby Bingo’ (p. 119). Similarly, the funeral of Elias Lloyd’s mother is an occasion for family to reunite, despite the solemn and strictly ritualised behaviour demanded of the occasion, and its stifling effects on the young Rhys: ‘[t]hey had put on their best clothes and eaten their fill, and, little as Rhys suspected it, they were enjoying their holiday’ (p. 104). Like Megan, many of Vaughan’s characters meet their partners at ritualised events or occasions related to folk customs. John Bevan meets his wife at a fair (p. 8) and Esther meets Rhys at a singing meeting (p. 35). Here we see how folk custom literally constructs the community, building new couples and families. Folk culture is shared, and in sharing it the community unites and binds together. With this in mind, we can read Vaughan’s use of folk culture not only as a means of reasserting her Welsh identity, but as a bid to reintroduce herself into the Welsh ‘community’.

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<sup>368</sup> Mark E. Workman, ‘Folklore and the Literature of Exile’, *Folklore, Literature and Cultural Theory: Collected Essays*, ed. Cathy Lynn Preston (New York: Garland, 1995), pp. 29-42 (p. 29). All further references are to this edition.



While folk culture binds the community, it simultaneously organises its members into a strict hierarchical structure. Traditions and customs define and display the status of the individual, and the individual's social standing determines his or her role in the ritualised event. We saw in chapter five how Owain's mother in *Iron and Gold* organises the seating at her son's wedding feast: '[a] great to-do she made getting everyone into place in order of rank' (p. 50). Occasionally, there are even separate traditions for different classes. *Her Father's House* depicts the Pugh family, in accordance with their social position, following the tradition of decorating family graves:

Mark had removed to Tŷ Gwyn from a farm ten miles away which had been rented by generations of Pughs. He and his sister, being the only survivors of their race, yearly visited its graves to 'put them straight against Easter-tide.' Good Friday, when folks of inferior station set their gardens, was the chosen day. (p. 26)

Esther in *The Battle to the Weak* is one of these 'folks of inferior station'. We are informed that her garden 'had not been set, for Easter fell late that year, and the custom of the country decreed that Good Friday should be the gardener's special day' (p. 215). The rituals of folk custom can be used as a means of displaying a high or aggrandised status. Funerals, in particular, in Vaughan's novels seem to represent little more than an opportunity to display decorous behaviour and wealth.<sup>369</sup> This is evident in Elias Lloyd's attitude towards his mother's funeral in *The Battle to the Weak*:

I'll not have it said as I were too poor to bury my own mother stylish ... The way down to Lewisbridge from here bein' that steep, the coffin 'ull have to be carried, so the neighbours 'ull have a good chanst to see what an expensive one I've stood her, Yes, indeed, the talk 'ull be goin' out and 'twill come to John Bevan's ears no doubt, and vex him proper to hear me praised for so good a son. (p. 95)

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<sup>369</sup> Weddings, funerals and Christenings are, of course, Christian rites. There is also, however, syncretism between the Christian belief behind the occasion and the pagan practices which accompany it. For example, many of the weddings in Vaughan's novels portray not only the Christian ceremony, but also the traditional mock combat and capture of the bride by force, which are residual elements of a much older tradition. The traditions which surround what have become Christian ceremonies are also discussed by Stevens in *Arferion Caru*, and Cligieth, *C'nebrwn ac Angladd*, and by Owen in *Welsh Folk Customs*.

Not only does folk culture play a pivotal role in the construction of communal identity, it also has the power to shape the identity of the individual.

Moreover, the ritualised nature of folk custom means that the behaviour of those involved in its performance is prescribed and subject to strict rules. This is displayed at a wedding in *Iron and Gold*. While the young people dance, ‘the married women must sit quiet in the shade’ (p. 11). Their changed status within the community forces their behaviour to change as well. The convention governing ceremonial events is seen at Owain’s wedding. As he strikes up a solemn tune, the crowd cry ‘[t]is a funeral you did ought to make such dull old verses for... Was that the most frolicsome as you could be giving us on your wedding day? For shame you doleful bridegroom’ (p. 54). Occasions call for the appropriate ritualised behaviour and the crowd’s disapproval does not subside until the prescribed mode of conduct is adopted. His mother comes to Owain’s aid, ‘[a] rollicking ballad of her own youth she ordered him to play ... Before long, good temper was restored’ (p. 54). Similarly Rhys’s behaviour is policed by his relatives according to the rules of mourning in *The Battle to the Weak*. When he asks to visit Esther, his aunt tells him while ‘she dabbed her dry eyes with a black-bordered handkerchief’ that, ‘I don’t see it at all decent, Rhys, for you to be goin’ courtin’ on your way to the house where your granny is lyin’ a cold corpse’ (p. 89). This need for conformity in the rural community, and its relationship with folk culture, is discussed by Trevor M. Owen who remarks that:

it is the inherent conservatism of the peasantry which keeps alive old customs... Pressure making for conformity is so subtle and unobtrusive in such circumstances that to depart from conventional ways is inconceivable on the part of any individual.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>370</sup> Owen, *Welsh Folk Customs*, p. 19.

While folk culture creates and reinforces group identity, it also controls the identity of its members to the detriment of the individual. The negative elements of the community and its adherence to custom are revealed. Vaughan questions the very community of which her texts seem to endeavour to become a part.

As Owain's mother says in *Iron and Gold*, 'safety is in herd and flock, as cattle and sheep do know' (p. 20). To deviate from the rules of the community incurs punishment. The truth of his mother's statement is discovered by Owain when he marries the fairy, Glythin. His marriage to an outsider ostracises him from the community:

they no longer hailed him friendly nor urged him to favour their merry-makings, they would not let him go his way unmolested. He was wedded to a stranger; and those who mistrusted what they could not comprehend, jeered at him for his marriage. (p. 61)

The greatest loss is his status as a Bard. He complains, '[t]is tiresome... when I'm singing so grand, to be no longer sought after and to have my house shunned by such deaf fools and blind' (p. 61). The bard, with his important relationship with folk culture, enjoyed an elevated status within the community and was welcomed into the homes of the wealthy. In *Harvest Home*, Cadnau the Bard is greeted with a large feast at Great House. The narrator describes how he 'entered with the assurance of one who was welcome everywhere' (p. 147). Owain's loss of status, then, is great indeed. Similarly, Glythin receives the three blows with iron that banish her from the mortal world, when she fails to conform to ritualised behaviour at a Christening, a funeral and a wedding. The first blow comes when 'Owain marvelled to find her grave at the christening supper' (p. 84). The second blow is occasioned after Owain's Mother's funeral, when Glythin points out the hypocrisy of the mourning ritual, saying, 'you with your long faces, put on like

masks, are learning children to dread that which the angels do rejoice over – the going home of a soul’ (p. 121). The morals of her fairy world clash with Christian dogma. Owain is irked by her lack of conformity and ‘[b]ecause she had answered him thus before others, he was enraged against her; and not knowing what he did cried out again, “Be quiet,” and struck her with the flat of his knife’ (p. 122). The final blow comes after their son’s wedding. Owain is dismayed by yet another failure to agree with the general feeling: ‘When he found her at the church door he was further angered to see her face sorrowful among so many that were glad’ (p. 175). Both Glythin and Owain’s punishment for breaking the laws of custom of the community is a form of exile. Glythin is doubly excluded, first as an outsider and then as an exile. The fate of Laetitia and Gronwy in *Here Are Lovers* can be read in a similar way. The couple commit suicide because they cannot conform to the roles defined for them by the community. Their death, therefore, can be construed as a sort of ultimate exile.

Given the heroine’s doubly exiled status, it is interesting that Vaughan chose to adapt the particular tale of the lake fairy in *Iron and Gold*. The story of Llyn-y-Fan-Fach is very well known and its grounding in ancient Welsh folklore may cause it to be seen as ‘the Welshest’ of her works, as Aaron writes.<sup>371</sup> Nonetheless, the central tension in the tale arises from Glythin’s problematic identity and the inability of the community to welcome her. Throughout the novel, the other characters refer to her as ‘strange’ (p. 118) or ‘the stranger’ (p. 119). To conceal her origins in the Fair Tribe, Owain’s mother tells the neighbours that Glythin is ‘a wealthy bride come here from foreign parts’ (p. 43). Her foreignness is alluded to as we also see the fairy leaning over her baby’s cradle as she, ‘sang to a foreign stave, words that were not familiar’ (p. 90). Fairies had traditionally

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<sup>371</sup> Aaron, foreword to *Iron and Gold*, p. ix.

been linked with problematic identities. There were numerous families in Wales that were thought to have originated from fairy stock. One famous fairy family was the Pellings of Snowdonia, described by William Williams of Llandegai as:

A race of people inhabiting the districts about the foot of Snowdon ... formerly distinguished and known by the nickname Pellings which is not yet extinct. There are several persons and even families who are reputed to be descended from these people... These children [Penelope's] and their descendants, they say, were called Pelling, a word corrupted from their mother's name Penelope... The best blood in my own veins is this fairy's.<sup>372</sup>

The family were reputedly jeered by others due to this link, a problem not uncommon, according to John Rhŷs, who writes that 'so called fairy families took great umbrage to their origins being referred to. Some of them changing their un-Welsh name as a result'.<sup>373</sup> Rhŷs convincingly theorises that many of these families of 'un-Welsh' name must have been English or Scottish incomers.<sup>374</sup> Other accounts claim that fairies spoke an early form of Irish which is perhaps alluded to in Glythin's foreign songs.<sup>375</sup> Juliette Wood has pointed out that fairy stories may serve an important social and psychological purpose; in the case of the Lady of Llyn-y-Fan-Fach, to rationalise the disconcerting change that marriage and the move into a new household can instigate. She explains that fairy tales 'become more than an element of continuity with a past culture. They are also a mechanism for distancing oneself from the complexity of the social context and indeed commenting on it'.<sup>376</sup> Vaughan's use of the fairy tale in *Iron and Gold* can be read as serving a similar function. While Vaughan uses Welsh folklore and custom to reconstruct her Welsh identity, she is also drawn to the tale of an outsider. Like Glythin, Vaughan is

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<sup>372</sup> William Williams, *Observations on the Snowdon Mountains* (London, 1802), quoted by Rhŷs in *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx*, p. 48.

<sup>373</sup> Rhŷs, *Celtic Folklore: Welsh and Manx*, pp. 67-8.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid*, p. 69

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid*, p. 279.

<sup>376</sup> Wood, *Folklore* (vol 103), p. 59.

Welsh but she is Welsh in a different way from the majority of the community. As we have seen, she is rendered different by her elevated class position and the anglicisation associated with lofty rank as well as her physical removal to London and America.

Vaughan can be seen to explore her own identity through that of Glythin, the outsider and the exile. In fact, Vaughan uses significant personal details from her own life in her depiction of the character. Glythin's insistence that Owain find her a ring of both 'iron and gold' (p. 31) is taken from Vaughan's own directive to Charles Morgan twenty years before she wrote the novel.<sup>377</sup> Mark E. Workman comments that '[w]here community merges, exile splits apart... So an exile always calls to mind the place from which he departs, and community always carries within it a negative image of itself, what it means to be "outside."'<sup>378</sup> Vaughan's use of folklore can be seen as a bid to position herself within the community but, owing to her choice of folk tale, she simultaneously draws attention to her status on the margins of Welsh identity.

The outsider position is not seen as completely undesirable, however. Vaughan's text, like the legend, strongly sympathises with Glythin. Vaughan defends and can even be seen to exult in the fairy's liminal status. Glythin retains the moral high ground in *Iron and Gold* while she reveals the follies, hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness of the community. When she draws attention to the false mourning displayed at her mother-in-law's funeral, the community deems Glythin 'crazed' (p. 123). Their true concern, however, is that she has exposed their failings: 'everyone had been shocked; and, what was less agreeable, called to account for their hypocrisy. Black as a flight of rooks, and

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<sup>377</sup> In a letter from Charles Morgan to Hilda Vaughan, dated 31<sup>st</sup> January, 1923, Morgan details his exhaustive search for an iron and gold wedding ring for Vaughan, declaring, 'I have sacked London for an iron and gold ring.'

<sup>378</sup> Workman, *Folklore, Literature and Cultural Theory*, p. 30.

cawing in unison, they departed without delay' (p. 123). The image of the united, conforming community is mocked by Vaughan in her derogatory simile. As an outsider, unfamiliar with the rules and rituals of her new home, Glythin is able to question them. When Owain tells her that she must shut all the curtains after his mother's death, Glythin asks, '[f]or whom are we to be in darkness, the living or the dead?' (p. 113). Her question reveals the insincerity of tradition that places greater value on seemliness rather than true emotion. Rhys plays a similar role in *The Battle to the Weak*. Rhys, like Glythin and Vaughan, is Welsh, but he is educated and has lived in Canada, which has distanced him from his rural Welsh roots. From this external position he, too, sees the community's failings and points them out to Esther:

the church- and chapel-going people of Wales are all obsessed, as you yourself have been, with their family ties – that and nothing else. They recognise no larger duty. They carry on their petty feuds from generation to generation, and justify them in the name of loyalty. (p. 226)

The community disapproves of his lack of conformity. The parson denounces him as, 'a most undutiful son ... He has no more veneration for the State than he has for the Church. He is a revolutionary – a troublesome and dangerous fellow' (p. 273). The novel, however, depicts his endeavours to provide free education to the local children as Rhys turns his home into a library and opens an institute for learning in Aberdulas (p. 225). Esther tells the parson that Rhys has a great mission in life:

A mission as not one o' you here is big enough to understand. Joseph's brethren you are, sayin' when you do see him, 'Behold, this dreamer cometh.' That is how it has allus been. The man as is better and wiser nor his brethren is bein' hated by them. Maybe as Rhys is come before his time and 'ont meet with honour like what Joseph did at last. But whatever do happen to him in this life, 'tis men such as he as'll be remembered after they are dead – men as is trying to change the wickedness of the world instead o' shuttin' their eyes to it, and passin' by on the other side like what you and your comfortable sort do do. (p. 274)

Like Rhys and Glythin, Vaughan is positioned on the margins of the community of which she writes. While Vaughan shows some desire to be part of this community, her semi-outsider status is also celebrated since it allows her to view objectively its shortcomings and reject its negative aspects. Consequently, she is never entirely reconciled with its shared identity and values and inhabits a position of relative exile.

### III

In one sense, however, we are all placed in a position of exile from the community created by folklore and folk customs as they belong to a past that is increasingly distanced from us. The past is established as the collective memory of a nation in *The Battle to the Weak*. As Esther is courting Rhys, she locates her actions as part of the tradition of a shared past. While she is listening to her lover's words, '[s]trange memories, not of her own, but of her race's past, began to stir in her. A thousand starlit lovmakings that had gone into her creation haunted her as had the sweet sadness of the singing an hour ago' (p. 40). But as personal memories fade, so too can the memories of a nation. Hilda Vaughan laments the loss of a particular Welsh past in her autobiographical essay, 'Far Away: Not Long Ago'. Here the author writes: 'when I look through my album of faded photographs I am sorry for my children. Wales they also may know and love. But they never knew Godfather Fred, the last gentleman in our little town to wear side whiskers ...'<sup>379</sup> The essay uses the image of fading photographs as a metaphor for the past which loses its detail and becomes less and less distinct. The elusive nature of the past is also conveyed in a passage from *Iron and Gold*. The tale of the fairy bride is initially narrated by 'Badger the Bard,' whose appearance and relation with the surrounding mining community are described thus:

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<sup>379</sup> Hilda Vaughan, 'Far Away: Not Long Ago', *The Radnorshire Society Transactions* (1982) 19-26 (25).



He wore knee-breeches and blue hand-knit stockings, long after the men with ruddy cheeks were gone to The Pits to hew coal. They came up out of the earth in grimed clothes of a new cut, with bleached faces, blackened over, and blue scars upon them that could not be washed off. They sang hymns to the organ in the chapel which they built. But he went to church of a Sunday, and on weekdays chanted, in fading voice, ancient love-songs to the thrum of an ancient harp. His memory reached back to a time when the land had been green and whole. That was simple enough to understand, for he was 'getting on' when the new century began. But legends of an age yet more remote were woven into his talk; and the tales with which he held children in thrall were told as if he himself had taken part in them. (p. 1)

The 'fading voice' and the 'age yet remote' point to an intangible past that evokes a sense of loss. The 'blue scars... that could not be washed off' imply that this change, prompted by the introduction of a new economic regime and its attendant culture, is irreversible. Like Vaughan's dislocation from the community, the reader is placed at a distance from a Welsh past that is beyond easy grasp.

The passage from *Iron and Gold* also displays how different historical periods become merged and blurred in our collective memory of the past. The quotation confuses time and notions of Welshness. Several pasts and markers of Welsh identity are juxtaposed in the passage. The age of mining and Nonconformity, seen in 'The Pits' and 'the chapel which they built', represent a recent past whose tropes have come to be viewed as traditionally Welsh. Woven around them are the images of church, 'ancient love-song' and an 'ancient harp', representative of an older Welsh past. Finally, there are allusions to an even older period in the 'legends of an age yet more remote'. Even more mysterious is the figure of the Bard, who is seen to span all these periods. The confusion of historical periods continues throughout the text. At the beginning of the novel a conversation between a young boy and his mother reveals that 'the Lady o' Llyn-y-van fach was coming up out o' the water while yet the Welsh was fighting some wicked old

Norman kings' (p. 1), which would place the novel in the twelfth century. Later, however, Rhys and Gwilym, deemed outlaws by the English tell of their 'flight across the sea in fear of transportation, and how, in hatred of the English gentry, they had served in the French army' (p. 71). This would seem to set the novel in the eighteenth century.<sup>380</sup> This treatment of history is reminiscent of that in *Translations* by Brian Friel. In his play, Friel places details from different historical periods into the same depiction of nineteenth-century Ireland. John Andrews describes his reaction to the apparent historical inaccuracies in the essay 'Translations and A Paper Landscape: Between Fiction and History'. After initially viewing the discrepancies as mistakes, Andrews writes that:

following a hint from the text, I began to see it rather as a set of images that might have been painted on screens, each depicting some passage from Irish history, ancient or modern, the screens placed one behind the other in a tunnel with a light at one end of the tunnel and the audience at the other, so that it is only the strongest colours and the boldest lines that appear in the composite picture exhibited on the stage.<sup>381</sup>

This analogy shows how a broad view of history can reveal a wider sense of national identity but this is achieved at the price of the loss of specific historical detail. *Iron and Gold* can also be read as a novel which adapts a Welsh legend but forfeits certain historical truths to pass on an ancient culture to a modern audience.

Despite their juxtaposition in *Iron and Gold*, the different historical periods do not co-exist harmoniously in the texts. The plural Welsh pasts, symbolised by the coal mines and chapel and the harp and song, clash in Vaughan's novels as Nonconformity erases the old Welsh customs and replaces them with its own ritualised behaviour. The

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<sup>380</sup> In a letter to Rosemary Sutcliff, dated November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1963, Vaughan writes: 'I used this legend as a symbol of a poet's loss of his soul or inspiration and I re-set it in the eighteenth century. You might consider this a mistake? I did not feel myself capable, though, of describing ancient Britain with such skill as you have done!' Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>381</sup> John Andrews in Brian Friel, John Andrews and Kevin Barry, 'Translations and A Paper Landscape', *The Crane Bag* 7:2 (1983), 118-124 (120-1).

transition is depicted in *Harvest Home* as an old woman discusses Eiluned and the

Methodist beliefs she follows. She says that Eiluned is:

a Methodistical sort, the way a good few o' them be these days ... Times be sadly changed ... This John Ellias and others o' his kind – preaching and praying and pulling long faces! No sense in it for young folks, I do tell 'em. We danced every Sunday in the churchyard – after prayers, mind you. And played at rare games, too. Kiss in the ring and the like, all among tombstones. The parsons saw no harm in it then. And were we any the worse for it? Not we! (p. 163)

Similarly, Rhys tells Esther in *The Battle to the Weak*, 'of harp-playing and dancing

which the early Methodists had forbidden' (p. 256). As we have already seen, the

Nonconformist leaders were also keen to eradicate the tradition of night courting. Their

success is mentioned by Squire Wingfield in *Here Are Lovers* as he tells his son that

bundling 'was admitted and deplored even by their own dissenting ministers. But it has

now been stamped out' (pp. 271-2). Vaughan does not portray Nonconformity solely as a

severe and destructive force for Welsh folk culture, however. Its positive qualities are

also seen in the virtuous Eiluned, who never submits to the continual tests of her morals

by Daniel Hafod. While the Nonconformity of the Lloyds in *The Battle to the Weak* is

hypocritical and stifling, it is countered by the more 'positive Nonconformity' of the

members of the chapel singing practice in Aberdulas. Before the music begins,

Esther stole a glance at the people who were near her and was struck by something earnestly expectant in their faces ... All these people had work-coarsened hands, rough and red, clasped between their knees or folded in their laps in an attitude of devotion. Yet they were not praying. They were waiting eagerly for something to happen for which they had been longing throughout the working hours of the week. (p. 32)

Vaughan's depiction of Nonconformity is ambivalent. While lamenting the loss of the old

folk customs, there are seen to be some merits in the new ones. The changing traditions

of the folk mirror a change in what it means to be Welsh. The conflicting pasts of

Vaughan's novels represent a changing sense of national identity.

Notions of past and identity are further confused as the characters in Vaughan's novels alter or interpret the past according to their own agenda. Rhys in *The Battle to the Weak* is a self-taught student of history (p. 36). While they are courting he tells Esther all about his study:

He talked of the 'golden age' of Wales, of poetry and harp playing, royal hospitality, and chivalrous love. From a smattering of historical knowledge he drew large deductions, ignoring what did not appeal to him in his country's story, and enlarging what was best, making the past appear as he would have the future be. In all good faith he fancied himself looking back, when in reality he was straining forward. (pp. 39-40)

In her description of Rhys' view of the past, Vaughan alerts us to the fact that the past is always elusive and problematic. The interpretation of history is inevitably subject to the values of the present time in which it is interpreted and is open to romanticised and idealised distortions. This is evident in *Harvest Home* as Daniel Hafod refers to *The Mabinogion* while he seduces his servant, Lizzie. She is dark, whereas the true object of his affections, Eiluned, is fair. Daniel uses the magical story of Blodeuwedd to imagine that he can transform Lizzie into Eiluned. He tells her 'a tale o' sorcery':

There was once a monarch by the name of Gwyddion [sic]. And he was a wizard. He made himself a fair woman – the one he wanted out o' the whole world – for his delight. (p. 141)

He misremembers the story, however, as Blodeuwedd was created by Gwydion as wife for Lleu and not to fulfil his own lust. In a parallel to Vaughan's retelling of *Iron and Gold*, the historic truth is lost as Daniel misremembers the past to suit his own purposes.

The past is also distorted in Vaughan's novels as folk culture is handed on into the future. The great importance of passing on culture from one generation to another is

emphasised in *Iron and Gold*. Owain is anxious to impart his knowledge of agriculture to his son, Nant: 'Chief among his concerns was the rearing of his first-born to be an industrious farmer. As his mother had trained him, so he would train his son' (p. 127).

Traditional ways are also continued down the female line. As Owain's mother tells Glythin,

I've made you grow like to myself. My very own child, see? When I'm gone, you'll be taking my place quite natural. And if only you was to bear him a daughter, and she'd be taking your place after. And her daughter and granddaughter, on and on. My grannie. My mother. Myself. Doing the same work for our men, always. That's how it has been. How 'twill ever be. A chain o' women. All alike. Every link. That life may hold unbroken. (pp. 105-6)

At the end of the novel, 'Badger' the Bard also identifies a young boy as the next to take on his trade (p. 205). In passing on tradition, however, it is inevitably altered. This process is illustrated in *Harvest Home* in the description of Great House: 'So heavy was the main door, it must have been constructed to resist a siege; but a flower garden, sunny with primroses at this season, grew in the sunken space that had once been a moat' (p. 11). After the troubles and violence of the past have ceased, the martial exterior elements of the house remain but, lacking relevance, they are no longer used for their original purpose and the appearance of the house changes. Similarly, in *The Battle to the Weak* traditional songs are passed on in an amended state. The congregation of Aberdulas sang 'hymn after hymn... in Welsh, set to tunes that, though modernised and re-named, were ancient as the race itself, wild as the hills from which it sprang' (p. 33). The original meanings of the songs are forgotten but they are passed on and altered to suit the values and folk culture of the current generation. Perhaps, though, this change is best evoked by Esther's dress in *The Battle to the Weak*. We see Esther in the kitchen of her home:

She seated herself on a wooden chair, arranging carefully the folds of her best dress. She had made it recently from a store of mourning bands accumulated by her grandmother in the days of splendid funerals. The stiff silk, that had draped the chimney pot hats of mourners long since gone the way of those they followed to the grave, was pleasantly substantial to touch. (p. 195)

Old customs here are literally altered and adapted to the needs of a new generation. Their meaning may not be fully retained but what is left is a 'substantial' object that is a clue to a nation's past identity.

Perhaps this final image of Esther's dress can be said to represent the way in which Hilda Vaughan uses Welsh folklore and folk culture in all five of the texts discussed here. Folk culture is a potent force with which to construct an identity and it is used by the author to reassert her own Welshness and to inscribe the texts with an 'authenticated' Welsh identity. Vaughan cannot be fully reconciled with this ideological 'community,' however, due to her texts' exultation in the outsider status and the culture's derivation in a past that partially eludes us all. The author perceived her own relationship with Welsh folk culture as one of dutiful preservation. Instead of merely harking back to a glorified past or producing a romanticised vision for a touristic audience, Vaughan's work attempts to make the Welsh folktale and traditional customs relevant in a modern context. In *Iron and Gold*, Vaughan takes an ancient oral tale without character development and adapts it to the form of the modern novel. The author gives life to old traditions for a modern audience, passing on folk culture in an altered form to suit a new Welsh generation that had also changed. While Vaughan presents the tale in English, this too, can be read as a bid to pass on Welsh tradition to a new majority of the English-speaking population of Wales, who might not otherwise have access to it. All five of Vaughan's novels examined in this chapter, as part of the new flowering of Welsh fiction

in English of the early twentieth century, pass on old traditions, giving them a contemporary form of Welsh identity. Like the mourning bands that make up Esther's dress, the old folklore and traditions behind it may not be passed on completely intact, but what remains is a 'substantial' object that gives a new generation clues to its nation's past.

## Chapter Seven

### **‘He was thinking in Welsh now, though he spoke in English’: Boundary levelling and maintaining in the language of Hilda Vaughan’s novels**

A Shropshire solicitor travelling in Radnorshire in 1743 stopped a Blethrach man to ask for directions. The man spoke no English, prompting the Englishman to write, ‘I now concluded we were indisputably in Wales.’<sup>382</sup> In his account, language is a clear marker of national identity, with the Welsh language unproblematically defining the Welsh as a people, while the uncomprehending English man inhabits the position of ‘other’ in an alien land. A later visitor finds a different linguistic topography. In 1804 Benjamin Heath Malkin writes,

in the south-east part of the county, about Clyrow, Paine’s Castle, and other places in that neighbourhood ... the Welsh language is still understood, and all are able to speak it, though they decidedly affect the English. About Presteign [sic], no natives understand Welsh, but it is partially known to all or most in the places five or six miles to the westward.<sup>383</sup>

Radnorshire is now a bilingual place, with the language spoken varying from village to village. Language is no longer reliable as a marker of national identity as the long process of colonisation and its aftermath have made the relationship between language and place more complex. Though Radnorshire was anglicised earlier and more thoroughly than many other parts of Wales, it is a situation that can be related in varying degrees to the country as a whole. Instead of separating the Welsh identity from the English, language could now, and often still does, form a dividing and divisive line between the Welsh themselves. Monica Heller has remarked that code-switching, the use of multiple

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<sup>382</sup> Anon, quoted by Llywelyn Hooson-Owen, *The History of the Welsh Language in Radnorshire since 1536*, (M.A. thesis, University of Liverpool, 1954), p. 13. All further references are to this text.

<sup>383</sup> Benjamin Heath Malkin, *The Scenery, Antiquities and Biography of South Wales* (1804), quoted by Roy Palmer in *The Folklore of Radnorshire* (Herefordshire, Logaston Press, 2001), p. 48.



languages or modes of expression is 'a boundary levelling or a boundary maintaining strategy'.<sup>384</sup> The use of a language can include those who are familiar with it, while excluding those who are not, simultaneously constructing similarity and difference. The association between language and boundaries is pertinent to Vaughan's work as she was, of course, a border writer who set many of her novels in the neighbouring Radnorshire countryside, but also as her hometown, Builth Wells, was on a linguistic fault-line during Vaughan's youth, where the receding Welsh language could still be heard.<sup>385</sup> Indeed, Vaughan recounts the 'dramatic' Welsh 'in which our maids conduct their private quarrels' in her autobiographical essay 'A Country Childhood'.<sup>386</sup> Incorporating Heller's idea, this essay will examine Hilda Vaughan's use of code-switching, and language in a broader sense, as a conciliatory or distancing device in order to negotiate and renegotiate issues of identity.

## I

In *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (1968), Glyn Jones laments the language-based 'split' in Welsh culture. He writes that: 'The division, even in some instances the hostility, between Welsh and Anglo-Welsh writers, has always been to me regrettable and distressing...'<sup>387</sup> Homi K. Bhabha describes such a rift in postcolonial countries in *The Location of Culture* (1994):

The problem is not simply the 'selfhood' of the Nation as opposed to the otherness of other nations. We are confronted with the Nation split within itself,

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<sup>384</sup> Monica Heller, introduction to *Codeswitching: Anthropological and Sociolinguistic Perspectives*, ed. Monica Heller (Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1988), pp. 1-24 (p. 1).

<sup>385</sup> See W. H. Howse, *Radnorshire* (Hereford: E. J. Thurstone, 1949) p. 305. All further references are to this edition. Although Vaughan lived in Builth Wells, which is in Breconshire, she seems to have felt a great kinship with the neighbouring county of Radnorshire.

<sup>386</sup> Hilda Vaughan, 'A Country Childhood', *The Radnorshire Society Transactions*, vol. LII (1982) 9-18 (15).

<sup>387</sup> Glyn Jones, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues: Essays on Anglo-Welsh Writers and Writing* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1968), p. 44.

articulating the heterogeneity of its population. The barred Nation *It / Self*, alienated from its eternal self-generation, becomes a liminal signifying space, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonist authorities and tense locations of cultural difference.<sup>388</sup>

Hilda Vaughan's novels acknowledge the antagonism generated as such boundaries and divisions are created according to language. When John Bevan travels west (and thus towards the Welsh-language heartlands) to the market town, Aberyscir, in *The Battle to the Weak* (1925) he is greeted by the:

high pitched voices of a Welsh crowd, engaged in congenial pursuit of bartering, [who] made a deafening clamour. John Bevan, coming from an anglicized border country, could not speak his own language, and despised his fellow countrymen who were able to do so as much as they despised him.<sup>389</sup>

Here, the linguistic differences mark the border between counties but in *The Candle and the Light* (1954) language divides the community within a town. Vaughan's novel is reminiscent of Bhabha's description, as the outbreak of the Boer War highlights community divisions that are rooted in language, politics and class:

The professional class, to a man, and most of the wealthier trades-folk, were anglicized, members of the Church of England and Tories, like the neighbouring landed gentry. But the town's poorer classes and the farming community of the district spoke Welsh, were Nonconformist, Liberal and opposed to the war.<sup>390</sup>

Vaughan's matter-of-fact, omniscient view of the divisions is significant in both texts. She refrains from taking sides or passing judgement and merely comments on the existence of opposing groups.

The latter quotation also draws attention to the idea that language is one marker of a prescribed set of ideological beliefs that creates a 'type' of Welsh identity. The

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<sup>388</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 148. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>389</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Battle to the Weak* (New York and London: Harper Brothers, 1925), p. 14. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

<sup>390</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Candle and the Light* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1954), p. 76. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

language used by a character, it seems, goes hand in hand with a corresponding religion, politics and class position. For example, *The Invader* (1928) is set in a 'remote agricultural district where folk were divided into small mutually hostile groups according to their race, class and religion'.<sup>391</sup> The parson is baffled by the Squire's failure to fit into these categories: he 'did not understand why one who spoke good English and despised Dissenters never attended his parish Church' (pp. 15-16). The Squire's language, it seems, should be an indicator of other attributes expected of an 'Anglicised' person, just as the Welsh identity of other characters is expected to conform to an established mould.<sup>392</sup> If the Welsh language is part of a Welsh identity, along with Nonconformity, radicalism and membership of the lower class, we are left to wonder where this positions the English-speaking Welsh characters of Vaughan's novels. It begs the question of whether the English-speaking Welsh can indeed have access to a Welsh identity.

An answer to this question can be found in the examination of Nonconformity, which is often closely identified with the Welsh language. The link between Nonconformity and Welsh can also be seen in *The Candle and the Light* as embodied in the character of Amos Rhys. His Welshness is constantly emphasised and it is no coincidence that he is called 'The Minor Prophet'. The text's intertwining of language with religion can be seen in the following passage:

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<sup>391</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Invader* (London: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1928), p. 16. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

<sup>392</sup> Gwenllian in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* (1932) is another character who baffles others as she transcends the categories of identity. Dick listens to an exchange between his wife and the lodge-keeper: 'Gwenllian could speak Welsh as fluently as he. Her voice became more resonant and flexible when she spoke the language of her race. Dick had often been amused to hear her in dramatic conversation with the people' (p. 91). His amusement is soon soured as 'Silent and constrained, he listened to her in astonishment, using their dialect, rolling her Rs, raising her voice at the end of every phrase' (p. 111). Dick has hitherto been accustomed to hearing Gwenllian speak in the Standard English that her class demands. Gwenllian's ability to adapt her identity is shocking to him. [Hilda Vaughan, *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* (London: Gollancz, 1932).]

Whenever the Minor Prophet grew excited he shed his veneer of English accent, rolled his *r*'s, broadened his vowels and stressed his syllables in the lilting chant he used for his mother tongue. He was thinking in Welsh now, though he spoke in English, and was carried away by the *hwyl* that had gained him local fame as a chapel preacher. (p. 23)

It is as if his Welshness visibly grows with the progress of the description. The shift in tense gives the effect of a metamorphosis taking place immediately before us. He begins with a 'veneer of English accent' before his voice becomes increasingly Welsh, the words 'mother tongue' alert us to his true identity, he translates his speech from his Welsh-language thoughts and ends up at the pinnacle of Welsh language and identity, the 'hwyl' of a Methodist preacher. This association in Vaughan's work can be compared with the method used by Caradoc Evans, who fuses language and religiosity in *My People* (1915). Duncan Davies recalls Evans 'referring to the language difficulty. To write in ordinary English would destroy the effect. Caradoc pondered over this matter for two or three weeks and evolved the idea of a basis of Old Testament diction...' <sup>393</sup> Evans uses biblical language, combining it with the Music Hall delivery of Marie Lloyd and literal translations and mistranslations of Welsh to convey the Welsh language of his characters.

Vaughan, however, complicates this prescribed identity with her association of religiosity with English-speaking as well as Welsh-speaking Wales; with the Anglican Church in Wales as well as Nonconformity. In *The Battle to the Weak* characters of various denominations pepper their speech with biblical language and quotations. Esther, an English-speaking church-goer, describes a period of suffering as, 'like the lean kine in the dream of Pharaoh as did swallow up the fat kine' (p. 196). Other characters display a closer resemblance to the malignant and hypocritical religiosity of Evans' figures. Elias

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<sup>393</sup> John Harris, introduction to Caradoc Evans, *My People* (Bridgend: Seren, 2003) pp. 9-47 (p. 16).

Lloyd, an English-speaking Methodist threatens John Bevan in biblical-style curses. He rages:

Do thou requite mine enemies for this ... Let them be as the dust before the wind, and the angel of the Lord scatterin' them. Let their way be dark and slippery, and let the angel of the Lord persecute them. Let hot burning coals of fire fall upon them, and let them be cast into the fire and into the pit that they never rise up again. (pp. 21-2)

Lily Bevan attends church but shares Elias' unpleasant biblical language. Lily remarks that 'a bastard child born in sin is allus going back to the devil, like a dog to his vomit as the Bible do say' (p. 143). Vaughan alters the perception of religious diction as a common feature of the Welsh-speaking populace only. She broadens the identity to encompass all Welsh people, regardless of their language. This is evident in *Her Father's House* as Uncle Mark's voice contains 'the lugubrious sing-song which Nell had learnt to connect with acts of worship'.<sup>394</sup> Here, it is the Welsh accent and not the language that is linked with religion. Instead of a boundary that divides the Welsh, Vaughan shows that the predilection for biblical language is a feature that differentiates the Welsh from the English. She essentially moves the boundary elsewhere. This is illustrated in *The Battle to the Weak* as the invalided Gladys lies in bed reading:

She seized upon any modern story-books that Esther was able to bring her, and spelled her way through them laboriously. But she never enjoyed them as she enjoyed the simpler stories of the Testaments ... To her it [the Bible] was just a book full of adventures, battles and love-making, of the journeys, the business and pleasures of a pastoral people who were nearer to her than more sophisticated heroes and heroines whose psychological intricacies bewildered her. Not only were the characters in the Bible more comprehensible, but their stories were told with a simplicity that left her to fill in the details to her own satisfaction. She did not want to stumble with difficulty through descriptions of dress and appearance. The word 'comely,' or the brief phrase 'good to look upon,' were sufficient to set her mind at work... (p. 172)

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<sup>394</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *Her Father's House* (London: William Heinemann, 1930), p. 7. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

Although Gladys is a monoglot English-speaker, her relationship with the texts that she reads is specifically Welsh. It is significant, here, that the English novel is established as alien and unsuitable for the Welsh. The morality of the two nations, and even the way their minds work are depicted as fundamentally different. Vaughan constructs a Welsh identity that responds to the stories of the Bible, though interestingly not so much its religious messages. Even the language of the Bible is presented as more relevant to a Welsh person of either language. Vaughan blurs the boundaries that are ‘tense locations of cultural difference’ in Bhabha’s model of a split nation.

This linguistic and cultural blurring goes further. If we examine the English words spoken by the Welsh characters, particularly those belonging to the working class, it is clear that Welsh syntax and direct translations of Welsh phrases and expressions are being used. For example, in *Iron and Gold* (1948), Owain’s mother asks: ‘Whatever’s on you?’ (p. 94), to mean ‘what is the matter with you?’, a direct translation of the Welsh ‘*Beth sydd arnat ti?*’<sup>395</sup> Similarly in *The Battle to the Weak* Aunt Polly tells Esther that Rhys’ Uncle has no children, ‘pity on him’ (p. 42), a translation of the Welsh ‘*trueni arno fe*’. When Glythin declares to Owain ‘Catch you this if you can’ (p. 66), the syntax may appear odd to an English speaker as it is a translation of ‘*Dal di hwn os fedri di*’. In a similar way, Esther says to Rhys, ‘Go you on’ (p. 54). The emphatic here is used as it would be in the Welsh language (‘*Cer di ’mlaen*’). Such a borrowing from the Welsh would seem to adhere to Bill Ashcroft’s description of a text from a postcolonial literature that uses ‘devices of otherness’ such as ‘syntactic fusion, in which the English prose is structured according to the syntactic principles of a first language; neologisms,

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<sup>395</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *Iron and Gold* (1948; Dinas Powys: Honno, 2002), p. 94. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

new lexical forms in English which are informed by the semantic and morphological exigencies of a mother tongue'.<sup>396</sup> Vaughan, however, is not solely using a device of postcolonial literature but is also often faithfully transcribing the dialect of Radnorshire in which the majority of her novels are set. Radnorshire was anglicised earlier than many parts of Wales, with the most rapid decay of the language occurring during the eighteenth century.<sup>397</sup> Writing in 1949, W. H. Howse, however, identified the fact that 'the Welsh influence has persisted in many of the expressions still in use, and in the construction of certain phrases which form the common language of the county'.<sup>398</sup> Vaughan's characters often use terms from Howse's glossaries such as 'allus' for 'always' (for example, Annie Bevan says she 'do allus seem to be sayin' the wrong thing' in *The Battle to the Weak*, pp. 22-3); 'liefer' for 'rather' (Dame Hafod says 'I'd liefer not talk of it' in *Harvest Home*, 1936);<sup>399</sup> and the use of 'en' for a person or object (for example in *The Invader* the men tell Miss Webster that they cannot help her work 'as we are all friends of Daniel Evans, we have promised to shift his furniture for 'en', p. 117). Radnorshire dialect is a form of anglicised Welsh, a hybridised language that traverses the borders of England and Wales, incorporating the language of both countries. It is significant that it crosses over into the old kingdom of Mercia, literally crossing the dyke built by the Mercian king

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<sup>396</sup> Bill Ashcroft, 'Is that the Congo? Language as Metonymy in the Post-Colonial Text', in *World Literature in English*, 29/2 (1989), 3-10 (5).

<sup>397</sup> Llywelyn Hooson-Owen, *The History of the Welsh Language in Radnorshire Since 1536*, (M.A. thesis, University of Liverpool, 1954), p. 195. All further references are to this edition. As Hooson-Owen states, 'the period of most rapid decay of the language was that from 1750-1820' after which it was almost completely eradicated from the eastern and central parts of the county (p. 195).

<sup>398</sup> Howse, *Radnorshire*, p. 275.

<sup>399</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *Harvest Home* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1936), p. 97. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

Offa.<sup>400</sup> It is a dialect that replicates the devices used by postcolonial literature to portray the language of the colonised culture.

In fact, Vaughan's use of the Radnorshire dialect contains so many translations of Welsh words, phraseology and grammar that when the plot moves to other parts of Wales and different historical periods it is difficult to discern what language the characters are actually speaking in many of her novels. While *Harvest Home*'s setting in eighteenth-century Ceredigion suggests that its characters must be speaking in Welsh, Vaughan never specifically states that this is the case. *Iron and Gold* is also set in the distant past and so would conceivably contain Welsh-speaking characters but Vaughan does not tell us and the clues from the text are conflicting. Owain's mother refers to the 'sour old English-speaking clergy' (p. 83) which suggests that she and her son are different from them and thus Welsh speaking. Owain sings a song, however, in which it is suggested that Welsh is no longer spoken in the district. As he sang, he 'repeated these words until they were defaced as a coin by long usage and their meaning quite forgot' (p. 96). Similarly, in *The Invader* it is stated that Davey, the shepherd, shouts to his dogs in Welsh (p.71). While the characters, therefore, can speak Welsh, it is never stated whether they do or not for the remainder of the novel, and perhaps due to the specific mention of its use here, it is unlikely. The language they are speaking is withheld as a marker of identity in her work, allowing a wider range of Welsh readers to identify with the characters. It is their Welsh identity and not their language that becomes important. The linguistic boundaries as markers of difference are left wide open.

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<sup>400</sup> Howse also comments that Radnorshire dialect 'is shared to a greater or less extent by certain other counties – Herefordshire, Shropshire, Cheshire, and Worcestershire for instance, - and derives largely from the old Kingdom of Mercia. [See W. H. Howse, 'The Speech of Radnorshire, *The Radnorshire Society Transactions* 22 (1952) 58-63 (58).]



Where Vaughan's boundary levelling between the Welsh-speaking and English-speaking Welsh characters becomes slightly more problematic, however, is in their relationship with place names and the land. Roy Palmer has identified the fact that in anglicised Radnorshire, the last bastion of Welsh is its place names:

As with farms so with fields and other features of the landscape such as woods and valleys, Welsh names remain widespread. Over and over again words recur such as *bryn* (hillside), *cae* (field), *coed* (wood), *cwm* (dingle), *dol* [sic] (meadow), *ffin* [sic] (boundary), *ffrwd* (stream), *llwyn* (tree, grove), *nant* (stream, valley), *rhos* (moor, bog), *rhyd* (ford), *tir* (land), and *twyn* (hillside).<sup>401</sup>

This is certainly the case in Vaughan's novels, whose settings, on the whole, have thoroughly Welsh names such as Aberyscir in *The Battle to the Weak* and *The Invader* and Cwmbach in *A Thing of Nought* (1934), which is significant given the importance placed upon naming by postcolonial theory. In *The Battle to the Weak*, the warring Bevans and Lloyds live on farms named, respectively, Pengarreg and Henallt. Their Welsh names denote their topographical features (the head or end of the rock and old hill). Yet the farms are situated near the village Lewisbridge, whose name has been anglicised, presumably from Pontlewis. Howse comments that while many places in Radnorshire retain their original Welsh names, '[i]t is true that many of the Welsh names have come "unstuck" in their spelling, as might be expected when their meanings have been forgotten ... There is a mixture of two languages in a few names'.<sup>402</sup> The erosion and anglicisation of place names can be seen in Vaughan's work. In *A Thing of Nought* Megan is seldom allowed to visit the neighbouring town of Pont Noyadd; 'noyadd'

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<sup>401</sup> Roy Palmer, *The Folklore of Radnorshire* (Herefordshire, Logaston Press, 2001), p. 55.

<sup>402</sup> W. H. Howse, *Radnor Old and New* (Kington: Mid-Border Books, 1989), p. 44. All further references are to this edition.

seemingly a corruption of ‘newydd’ (new) or perhaps even ‘neuadd’ (hall).<sup>403</sup> In *Harvest Home* a neighbouring farm is called The Plas, the hybridised form of *Y Plas* and names are misrecorded, such as Dinas Llas to which an extra ‘l’ has been added, presumably because this ‘sounds’ Welsh (*Dinas Las* means Blue Fort). Howse’s words also remind us that while the inhabitants of Pengarreg and Henallt live in their Welsh-named farms, they would not be able to understand the meaning of those names. Hooson-Owen recounts a Welsh visitor to the district in the early 1900s who said of its inhabitants:

[N]i ddeallent yr un o enwau eu sir ... Arhosodd tri gwr [sic] oedd yn canlyn ceffyl a throl i ymgomio a mi. Yr enw ar y drol oedd Blaenglynolwen, yr un gair hir. Ni wyddent ar wyneb daear beth oedd ‘blaen’ na ‘glyn’ a phan awgrymais y gallai mai ffrydlif oedd Olwen fel Claerwen cofiasant fod rhyw nant fach yn rhedeg heibio’r lle... Mae’n rhaid mai tuedd i suo eu meddwl i gysgu wna..’r [p]lant, codi’n bobl ieuainc, a thyfu’n henafigwyr [sic] heb wybod ystyron y cartrefi y maent yn byw ynndynt [sic].<sup>404</sup>

(They do not understand any of the names of their county. Three men that were following a horse and cart stopped to converse with me. The name on the cart was Blaenglynolwen, the one long word. They had no idea what on earth ‘blaen’ or ‘glyn’ was and when I suggested that Olwen could be a stream like Claerwen they remembered that there was a small stream flowing past the place ... There must be a tendency to soothe their minds to sleep amongst the children, to become young people, and grow into old men without knowing the meaning of the names of the homes in which they live.)

The Kenyan writer, Ngugi wa Thiong’o, describes language as ‘a collective memory-bank of a given people’ and observes that taking it away is ‘like uprooting a community from history’.<sup>405</sup> This recalls a scene in *Iron and Gold* in which Owain reaps, while:

Generations, whose blood throbbed through his veins, had toiled with these same movements to this rugged tune and had repeated these words until they were defaced as a coin by long usage, their meaning quite forgot. Knowing no more than a bird does what it was he sang, he heard his chant rise and fall and gave it no heed. (p. 96)

<sup>403</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *A Thing of Nought*, in *A View Across the Valley: Short Stories by Women From Wales c.1850-1950* ed. Jane Aaron (1934; Dinas Powys: Honno, 1999).

<sup>404</sup> Anon quoted by Hooson-Owen, *History of the Welsh Language in Radnorshire*, p. 14.

<sup>405</sup> Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *Writers in Politics: Essays* (London: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 59-60.

Owain's innocent, 'birdlike' ignorance is reminiscent of the Radnorshire children whose minds are asleep to their Welsh culture. Here he is linked to the land and his ancestors in his toil and its accompanying song but he is simultaneously severed from them, and what they have meant in the past, in his ignorance of the meaning of his song's words. The divide between the English-speaking Welsh and their land caused by language is not fully explored by Vaughan but is hinted at as an unsettling rift in the unified Welsh identity that she attempts to construct for them.

While the Radnorshire Welsh have lost their language and its potent link with their homeland, all is not lost. This is seen if we take another look at John Bevan as he visits the market-town, Aberyscir. Here, as previously noted, he encounters the Welsh language that alienates him from his fellow-countrymen. The passage continues, however,

[b]ut he could shout as loud and gesticulate as freely in a bargain as the best of them; and when he had struck his man's extended hand with a dramatic gesture of finality signifying that the deal was made, he led away the cow he had bought, satisfied that he had done a creditable morning's work. (p. 14)

What emerges from this passage is not merely the division between the Welsh-speaking and the English-speaking Welsh people but also their ability to communicate in their shared values and similar traits. They do not share a language but they do share a characteristic way of communicating. Throughout Vaughan's novels, the loquaciousness of the Welsh, whatever their language, is heavily emphasised. In *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*, Gwenllian informs Dick that 'We Welsh are famous talkers' (p. 58). The Welsh, it seems, have a love for excessive language and a deftness in its use as we see Daniel in *The Invader* 'enjoying his eloquent pathos like a good Welshman' (pp. 65-6).

This is epitomised in the larger-than-life Amos Rhys in *The Candle and the Light* who rants in his newspaper, preaches in his chapel and waxes lyrical about literature in ‘his most polysyllabic style’ (p. 130). The verbosity of the Welsh seems to be a universal trait that is saved from stereotype in *The Invader*. The Squire is annoyed after he is interrupted by Daniel Evans and muses that the ‘Welsh could not keep their tongues from wagging. It was the same at magistrates’ meetings; they always prevented him from finishing what he had to say by their talk, talk, talk’ (p. 20). His words are ironic, however, as Daniel has interrupted what has been a lengthy and tedious speech by the Squire.

More than a Welsh way with language, there is a Welsh way *of* language, a way of communicating that is specifically Welsh. This can be seen in both *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* and *The Invader* as English incomers struggle to understand and be understood in their new locale. Miss Webster’s mode of address quickly alienates the rest of the community. When she first meets the Jones family she demands “‘Is there a man here who can help with my car?’... without any of those preliminary remarks on weather and condition of agriculture which the custom of Wales demands’ (p. 95). Her deficiency in the Welsh way of language causes offence. Nor can the Welsh understand English modes of address. Daniel misreads Miss Webster’s kind offer of more time to move out of his home as ‘he detected patronage and offence even in these well-meant words’ (p. 88). The Welsh and English ways of communicating are established as different and incompatible. This is a cause of paranoia for Dick in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*. He is a subject of interest to the small community who attempt to communicate with him:

To be followed, smiled at and saluted by strangers had made him shy, but until Jones had exchanged winks with the crowd there had been compensations in flattery. You couldn’t tell what thought was moving behind those dark, keen eyes. You couldn’t be sure why the man winked. (pp. 11-12)

He cannot understand their communicative signals and is alienated. It is significant that the Welsh cannot communicate with the English even when they are speaking the same language, although as John Bevan's experience at the market suggests, a lack of common language does not deter successful intercourse between the Welsh.

While there are differences between the Welsh, they are united in their greater difference from the English in Vaughan's novels. The idea of a specifically Welsh character independent of language can be seen in an edition of *Cymru* from 1892:

Y mae iaith Maesyfed yn Seisnig, ond y mae'r bobl mor Gymreig eu cymeriad a phobl Meirionnydd – yr un yn eu hofergoelion a'u traddodiadau, ... Nid oes fymryn o wahaniaeth rhwng pobl Maesyfed a phobl Maldwyn ...<sup>406</sup>

(The language of Radnorshire is English, but the people are as Welsh in their character as the people of Meirionnydd – the same in their superstitions and their traditions, ... There isn't a bit of difference between the people of Radnorshire and the people of Maldwyn...)

Vaughan uses this idea and extends it, creating the notion of a Welsh 'voice' rather than a Welsh language. It is expressed at its superficial level in a conversation between Valentine Gould and Grace Felin in *The Candle and the Light*:

'You *are* Welsh, aren't you?'

'Of course.'

'And proud of it,' he laughed. 'How was I to know? I did all the same. Your voice is softer, more flexible, than an Englishwoman's.' (p. 12)

More than an accent, the 'Welsh voice' is signifier of identity that unites rather than divides the Welsh. It is an essentially Welsh identity that is linked to and revealed in the voice. The idea that the voice betrays a true identity at times of heightened emotion recurs in Vaughan's novels and can be seen in Amos Rhys' loss of his 'veneer' of English accent when he is impassioned as well as in the return of Nest's sing-song when

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<sup>406</sup> An 1892 edition of *Cymru* quoted in Hooson-Owen, *History of the Welsh language in Radnorshire*, pp. 45-6.

she is excited in *The Curtain Rises*<sup>407</sup> and Rhys ‘dropping back into the idiom of his own people’ (p. 285) when he confronts his love for Esther in *The Battle to the Weak*. The latter quotation is reminiscent of a 1926 review by Dr. J. Gwenogvryn Evans in the *Western Mail* which states that ‘Hilda Vaughan ... has perfect mastery of the Welsh idiom in English guise.’<sup>408</sup> This ‘Welsh idiom’, rather than language, approaches the idea of a specifically Welsh way of communicating, of the Welsh voice that unites the Welsh and levels the boundaries that the two languages construct. Vaughan’s Welsh voice is accessible to all the Welsh as a unifying identity that, unlike the politics of language, maintains its border of difference from the English. While Vaughan does not join Glyn Jones in voicing consternation over inter-Welsh linguistic divisions, her novels go some way in attempting to heal the breach that they create.

## II

Vaughan’s attempt to use language as an equaliser becomes problematic, however. Language is not simply a means of constructing an identity but is, of course, a marker of the status of that identity as well. Their relation to language and communication is key to understanding the balance of power between the characters in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* (1932). It is a novel that is strangely preoccupied with language and its social performance. Gwenllian’s father, The Squire, is the epitome of machismo. He also displays mastery over language. He is approved of by the minister who declares, ‘[t]he Squire’s champion! Yes, indeed! He’s always the best speaker present’ (p. 42). On the other hand, Dick is characterised by his inadequacy in language and communication. He

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<sup>407</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Curtain Rises*, (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1935), p. 278. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

<sup>408</sup> Dr. J Gwenogvryn Evans in *Western Mail*, September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1926.

is always trying and failing to think of the right thing to say. His verbal ineptitude is displayed in his nervousness in conversation with his cousins: 'he stuttered' (p. 23) and his 'voice trailed off into silence' (p. 23). In fact, there are references to him stuttering and stammering throughout the novel (pp. 23, 27, 57, 58, 96). When Jones jokes with him, 'Dick could think of no reply to make. He had never been able, like Flash Frank and other officers in the regiment, to crack jokes with his inferiors and, at the same time, keep them in their place' (p. 16). Although he is socially superior, Jones's ease with language awards the upper hand to the working-class man. Dick also struggles to think of the right thing to say to guests, asking himself '[w]hat the devil did one say to a Bishop, and a Welsh Bishop at that' (p. 108). Dick uses 'inferior' words: "'Rot," he exclaimed, and wished he had not done so. It was such a schoolboy word and rather third-rate' (p. 57). This suggests that there is a hierarchy of discourses, which can denote the status of their user. The importance placed on language can be seen in an exchange between Dick and Gwenllian:

'Look here,' he cried, 'it's all rot you're wanting to turn me into a public man. You know I'm a damned bad, nervous speaker.'  
She forced a smile. 'You could overcome that. There's the classical example of a stammerer who trained himself for the sake of the state —'  
'Well I don't propose to spend *my* time on the seashore with pebbles in my mouth,' he answered. (p. 130)

The reference to Demosthenes alerts us to the idea present throughout the text that to master language is to have access to power.<sup>409</sup> Dick's verbal ineptitude is symptomatic of his weakness in the novel. He is a victim figure who is murdered at the close of the narrative.

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<sup>409</sup> Demosthenes (384-322 BC) was a prominent Greek statesman who was renowned as a very powerful orator. As a young man he had a speech impediment which, it is said, he eradicated by various means including standing on the seashore, reciting verses with pebbles in his mouth.

While Dick's powerlessness displays itself in language, John Bevan's might is verbally flaunted in *The Battle to the Weak*. We first encounter him as master of all he surveys. Before he leaves on his journey to market he takes stock of his possessions: 'My farm', 'My stock', 'My house' and even 'my missus' (p. 7). As he rides away his voice seems to exhibit his status:

He threw up his head and began to sing his favourite hymn – 'Jerusalem the golden, with milk and honey blest.' The words echoed from the far side of the narrow dingle down which he had begun to ride, and died away long after they had been uttered. He enjoyed making so much noise when he alone could be heard. The sound of his singing seemed to fill the universe. (p. 10)

In the same way that he owns his farm and its contents, his voice lays claim to ownership over his whole surroundings. His words 'fill the universe,' rendering him God-like and prefiguring the tyrannical power that he displays later in the novel. It is significant that his mastery over language is linked with his ownership of the land in this passage. It hints at the seizing of land and control of language that are part of the process of colonisation. Similarly, the battle for supremacy and land between Miss Webster and Daniel Evans in *The Invader* is partly played out in language. The English Miss Webster has inherited a farm in Wales and ejects the tenant, Daniel Evans. The novel depicts the battle of wits that rages, culminating in Daniel forcing Miss Webster to leave the district so that he can buy her farm. One exchange between them shows the relationship between language and power. Daniel tells Miss Webster,

'I am letting you cull fifty sheep.'  
'Cull?' Miss Webster repeated the word to herself, not sure of its meaning but unwilling to confess her ignorance.  
Daniel was quick to detect it. 'I must be teaching our terms here, I see, ma'am,' he remarked with condescension. (p. 86)



Control over language is a potent force. Here, the colonised subject who has had the English language imposed upon him as the instrument of empire has achieved such mastery over it that he wrests the power associated with it from the grip of the coloniser.

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The politics of language and its implications in the postcolonial context have an important bearing on Vaughan's work, particularly in her relationship with her audience. She was, of course, a Welsh writer who was writing in English for a large and diverse readership. As previously mentioned, reviews suggest that her books were being read in Wales, England, Scotland, Ireland, America, Sri Lanka, India, South Africa, Australia New Zealand, Canada and Egypt, for example. While they were being read by inhabitants of a country that had colonised Wales, they were also being read by inhabitants of countries that the Welsh had aided to colonise, rendering the portrayal of Welsh life open to interpretations from different vantage points. The fact that Welsh readers, with their varying grasp of the Welsh language, were also reading the novels meant that what words, expressions, history, geography and cultural terms and points of reference to translate or to gloss was a difficult and ideologically loaded question. As Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin point out in *The Empire Writes Back* (2002):

Ultimately, the choice of leaving words untranslated in post-colonial texts is a political act, because while translation is not inadmissible in itself, glossing gives the translated word and thus the 'réceptor' culture, the higher status.<sup>410</sup>

Vaughan's novels are interspersed with Welsh words such as '*cariad*', '*bach*', '*cwm*', '*diawl*' and '*duwch*', as well as the Welsh names of places and characters. While they generally go unglossed, they are usually either familiar or rendered comprehensible by

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<sup>410</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 65.

the context in which they appear. Their use constitutes what Gordon and Williams in 'Raids on the Articulate' categorise as 'extrinsic' use of a language. This is the least obtrusive of three levels of code-switching and defined as the use of italicised 'foreign' words 'merely to provide local colour'.<sup>411</sup> Vaughan does gloss some Welsh words, however, when she wants to ensure that the non-Welsh-speaking reader can understand. For example, in *Iron and Gold* Owain tells his mother and, more importantly, the audience, that he has named his fairy wife and will 'be calling her Glythin, which is meaning dewdrop' (p. 47). Presumably his mother, who has the same background as Owain, would understand the meaning of Glythin, so this interjection is for the benefit of the readership alone. The act of glossing privileges the dominant-culture language, English, and the Welsh word here is misspelled (it should be Gwlithyn) so the Welsh language is doubly undermined. Interestingly, Gordon and Williams state that this level of code-switching 'is only ever used by people whose second language ability is extremely weak.'<sup>412</sup> This can conceivably be argued of Vaughan's grasp of Welsh, since preparatory notes for her novels contain detailed glossaries provided by a friend more familiar with the language.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> Elizabeth Gordon and Mark Williams, 'Raids on the Articulate: Code-Switching, Style-Shifting and Post-Colonial Writing', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 33, no.2 (1998), 75-96. All further references are to this edition.

<sup>412</sup> See Gordon and Williams, *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, pp. 75-96.

<sup>413</sup> Vaughan did not speak Welsh herself and notes that were written for *Here Are Lovers* contain a glossary sent to her from a friend. The glossary contains a mixture of Radnorshire dialect, Welsh and agricultural terms with translations of 'A tidy step', 'Rammass' (which she uses in *Harvest Home*), 'Tŷ un nos', 'Cawl', 'Diawl' and 'Druan fach i' 'and a few such tags of Welsh all possible especially in the mouths of elders.' There is also a note that tells Vaughan that the Mari Lwyd was 'quite alive at your date'. The extensive glossary is many pages long and suggests that Vaughan received copious advice in this area from others. Many misspelled or misused Welsh words can be found in the texts. For example, while the word 'duwch' is used correctly in *The Battle to the Weak* and *The Invader* it is repeatedly spelled 'ddwch' (p. 21) in a later novel, *Iron and Gold*. In *Harvest Home* the name 'Gwydion' is spelled 'Gwyddion' in her mistaken retelling of the tale of the sorcerer in *The Mabinogion*. Of course these mistakes may not be Vaughan's; it is equally possible that these errors in Welsh language words were due to the English typesetters and

Not only did Vaughan use Welsh words but her novels, as we have seen, were also filled with Radnorshire dialect. Vaughan's use of dialect is extensive but she only uses the most accessible forms, avoiding the more obscure terms that would be incomprehensible and therefore alienating to an outside audience. One review published in March 1925 in *World Today* enthuses that Vaughan's 'transcription of the Welsh dialect is a very happy one and does not in the least hold up the easy flow of the narrative'.<sup>414</sup> Vaughan, it seems, was all too aware of the pressures from her multiple audiences. Kirsti Bohata writes that the 'lack of English-language publishers in Wales until the 1960s and 1970s forced Welsh authors writing in English to publish in England and therefore to fulfil the requirements of an English audience'.<sup>415</sup> This would have been made clear to the young author when she received a letter from W. Robertson Nicoll at *The British Weekly* in 1921 rejecting a story. He informs her that:

Many years ago I made great efforts to find a Welsh writer of idyll who would do for Wales what has been done for Scotland. I tried at least half a dozen. They found their severest critics among the Welsh themselves. Every idyll I published drew fierce criticism, and in truth the stories were not very good.<sup>416</sup>

While he urges her to go on to write a book, the letter also highlights the problems faced by a Welsh writer. The agenda of the publishers to find 'a Welsh writer of idyll', presumably that presented Wales in a palatable form to an English audience, is constrictive and, as the correspondent points out, the Welsh themselves have to be pleased. Vaughan was aware that she could offend Welsh sensibilities in her writing and

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publishers who printed her novels. Wherever the blame may lie, its effect is to undermine the language's value.

<sup>414</sup> *World Today*, March 1925.

<sup>415</sup> Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 115.

<sup>416</sup> Letter from W. Robertson Nicoll at *The British Weekly*, dated February 1<sup>st</sup>, 1921. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

in the speech entitled ‘Why authors are cads’ she describes an encounter with one such unhappy reader:

[S]he was a Welsh woman – a patriot – and had been deeply shocked, and personally grieved, by some of my fictitious characters, as though I had drawn the most brutal portraits of her own nearest and dearest! Holding my hand and petting it, she implored me in future to describe only what was brightest and best in our national character; in other words, to conform to her conception of what the Welsh ought to be, to make Welshmen in my story all brave, noble, generous and sincerely religious, and all the women all alike dutiful and chaste! Above all, she besought me to give to my stories an uplifting, moral tone, and an encouragingly happy ending! Being a Welshwoman, she was so eloquent and persuasive, and her earnest exhortations went on for so long, that I was almost reduced to tears of contrition, when the return of her family made my escape possible. I believe I was on the point of perjuring my soul and damning whatever artistic integrity I possess, by promising *never again* to let my imagination take charge of me, but to write only at her piously nationalistic dictation! This is the sort of trial to which we writers amongst artists are subjected...<sup>417</sup>

The Welsh press, however, was largely supportive of Vaughan. Post-Caradoc Evans they were painfully aware of how their country’s depiction would be viewed by their colonial neighbours. A reviewer in *Cambria Leader* in 1925 declared ‘here is the strongest novel he has had in his hands, dealing with Welsh life, for years. The progress of Hilda Vaughan, as a competent and understanding interpreter of Welsh life, will be of interest to her people.’<sup>418</sup> This view of Vaughan as an interpreter of Wales to the English seems an accurate portrayal of the positioning of the texts as Welsh-based but with a clear awareness of the English audience. This can be seen in a passage from *The Curtain Rises* in which Nest interprets Wales to her English suitor, Julian:

‘They’re mostly chapel folk in Llangeld and Welsh speaking. I was learning to talk it a bit myself.’

‘Oh,’ Julian said with raised eyebrows. ‘Then isn’t it your native tongue?’

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<sup>417</sup> Hilda Vaughan, unpublished speech entitled ‘Why authors are cads’, given at the Sunday Times Book Exhibition at Grosvenor House, London on 20<sup>th</sup> November, 1934. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.

<sup>418</sup> *Cambria Leader*, March 14<sup>th</sup>, 1925.

‘No. I’m Welsh, o’ course. But Radnorshire born. We were only coming down close to the Works when I was a lump of a girl. Father doesn’t hold much with the hilly people.’

‘The hilly people,’ Julian repeated. ‘Who are they? Fairies or something?’ Nest’s embarrassment vanished in laughter. ‘No, no! The people o’ the hills, o’ course. Up where the pits are. They’re a rough lot mostly – same as Cardies.’

‘Cardies? Who on earth are they?’

‘Why, from the county of Cardigan. You’ve heard it said, no doubt, as it’s only breeding pigs or parsons.’

He threw back his head and laughed. ‘No, I’ve never heard that. I shall learn a lot from you. And the people of Radnorshire are the salt of the earth – between the hilly folk and the Cardies?’

‘Oh, you’re laughing at me,’ Nest pouted. (p. 61)

Nest gives a brief overview of the language and inter-Welsh relations for the benefit, not just of the English Julian, but for the English readership as well, in a sort of double

English glossing. It is interesting that Nest is concerned that her ‘audience’ is laughing at her at the end of the passage and that she is anxious about how she is being perceived.

Nest, like Vaughan, glosses Wales itself for the English audience.

While her work is subject to the politics of language, Vaughan cleverly exploits the tension it creates in her novels. In *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*, Dick’s encounter with unfamiliar language dramatises the politics of reading as outlined by Ashcroft above. When he inherits an estate in Wales, Dick is taken on a tour of his new land by Mr. Lloyd, the agent:

He had begun taking it for granted that Dick understood his technical jargon. He spoke of sweet land and sour, of pleaching hedges and of silage. For even so plain an animal as the sheep, he had a string of preposterous names: theaves, tups, ewes, wether lambs, rams, hoggs. Dick lost count of them. Pigs, when Mr. Lloyd spoke of them, became sows or boars, brims or gilts. At last Dick was forced to admit that this was all Greek to him, and the fellow was surprised. As though, thought Dick in sore self-defence, I were to plunge some poor devil of a civilian into Autumn Manoeuvres and expect him to know what everything was about. Probably the agent despised him. (pp. 56-7)

Dick's reaction mirrors the potential experience of a reader whose language is not privileged by the text. The language is not glossed and so he feels his difference and distance from the speaker and is left feeling alienated. Dick does not merely reflect the possible feeling of a reader, however, but he can be read as actually representing the English reader who is simultaneously encountering Welsh words in the text. He informs Gwennllian that he has 'got the Williamses – the old lady and those two pretty daughters from the place with the unpronounceable name coming to tea' (p. 88). More than a shared difficulty in pronunciation, however, the potential process of alienation that a foreign language text can create is played out as Dick meets his tenants:

He failed to understand half they said, and was at times unsure whether they were addressing him in English, or in the Welsh language which they used amongst themselves. When the good news had reached him that he had inherited an estate at home, he had not bargained for its being inhabited by a lot of jabbering foreigners. He had thought of the principality as a remote part of England where the miners gave trouble but the fishing was good, and he had imagined tenant-farmers as red-faced fellows, honest but slow, quaint as rustic characters in a play. It was a shock to discover that most of his own tenants were bright-eyed folk, whose speech and dramatic gesture showed that they were quicker-witted than himself, and *he began to wonder whether the studied monotony of his own speech might not seem as comic to them as the chanting cadence of theirs was to him strange and irritating. Well, not comic perhaps. They would know of course that his way of speaking English was correct. But he was ill at ease among them* [my emphasis]. (pp. 55-6)

It is significant that Dick feels his difference most acutely in language in the novel.

The entire process of reading a postcolonial text is played out here. First Dick does not understand and feels 'unsure'. He then expresses resentment. He then questions the supremacy of his own language and is left feeling alienated. As we have seen, Vaughan seemed to be aware of her audience or rather audiences. She glossed or adapted her use of language accordingly, pandering to an English-speaking audience on a superficial level. Her portrayal of Dick's encounter with language, however, is a subtle way of

alerting the English to linguistic and cultural differences. The text undermines the privileging of Standard English and suggests that while it is 'correct', that there might be more interesting linguistic alternatives.<sup>419</sup>

As Vaughan has shown, the Welsh language and dialects can be used subtly to undermine the supremacy of Standard English. The Welsh language is also used in a far less subtle way against the English by some of the characters. Amos Rhys in *The Candle and the Light* uses Welsh in his abuse of English incomers as he strides down the middle of the road:

Strangers who drove through the town in motor-cars – their numbers had become a nuisance of late – swore at him. He enjoyed retorting in a blasphemous torrent of Welsh, enjoyed their stare of amazement when he shook his fist at the insolent 'foreigners'. (pp. 191-2)

In a similar manner, Davey uses the Welsh language to aid him in duping the English Squire in *The Invader*. Daniel Evans plans covertly to sell off his best sheep before Miss Webster can take them from him. His shepherd is caught doing this by the Squire.

However, Davey tells Daniel,

I touched my hat and spoke like butter just. 'Them's not ewes, sir,' I was telling him, and shouting to the dogs in Welsh to take 'em on quick out o' his sight. 'You were mistook, sir,' I said, 'them was wethers!' (p. 71)

Such a use of Welsh is double edged, as well as, perhaps, double-audience. While Welsh is used to secure a sort of victory of the Welsh characters over the English, its use also confirms anti-Welsh stereotypes of the language being used by the Welsh only to insult the English or for underhand purposes. Some Welsh readers might enjoy the joke, while their English counterparts might have their prejudices confirmed. It is also

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<sup>419</sup> In fact the supremacy of English is challenged in *The Battle to the Weak* as well, since Rhys's uncle suggests that Esther should be taught Welsh as 'she would soon pick it up' (68). Here, the suggestion is that the Anglicised Radnorshire inhabitants could learn or re-learn Welsh, thus reversing the process of anglicisation.

interesting that the text does not give Amos Rhys authority in the first quotation as it places the word 'foreigners' in inverted commas, suggesting that the narrator would not consider the English as such.

In a similar way, mimicry serves an ambivalent purpose in the novels. In *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*, Gwenllian tells Dick that her father 'was a gifted mimic, like so many Welshmen' (p. 64). This evokes Homi Bhabha's idea that mimicry is a tool that is often used by a colonised culture and that mimicry of the coloniser 'results in the *splitting* of colonial discourse,' rendering its authority ambivalent and open to subversion.<sup>420</sup> It is indeed seen to be used in this manner in the novel as the insolent Jones 'mimicked Dick's drawl' (p. 14), undermining his authority as his social superior, and his colonial superior (the text goes on to describe Jones as a 'squatting' 'native', p. 14). It is characteristic of this whole exchange between them, 'making him [Dick] uncomfortable' (p. 17). In *The Invader*, however, it is Monica, an English incomer who mimics the Welsh. Monica is accepted by the community, as Mary Anne's father says, '[y]ou'd almost say she was one o' us, she's that pleasant' (p. 113). However, Monica isn't quite one of them and when she visits the Joneses she is honoured with an enormous and rather comical feast. As she and Doctor Langdon, another of the Joneses' esteemed English guests, leave they talk about the hospitality they have received. The doctor tells Monica:

'Mercifully, not many of my patients can afford to be as extravagant as Mrs. Jones. But if they like you, as I can see they do, you'll find they'll all set before you the handsomest feast they can provide. Will you risk seeing more of them?' 'Yes,' she said, 'but won't they "see me terrible strange"?' (pp. 135-6)

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<sup>420</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, p. 91.



Monica's mimicry of her Welsh hosts is affectionate; 'she had been happy in their company' (p. 136). Her social and colonial position of superiority, however, adds a hint of patronisation. She mimics not only the difference in their speech but also their grammatical 'inaccuracy'. Her own position of ideological authority and use of Standard English makes her affectionate mimicry problematic. If we compare it with Vaughan's relationship with language, we can also see similarities. While Vaughan is Welsh, like Monica she is of a privileged class.<sup>421</sup> In her use of a dialect that was not her own but that of her social inferiors, might Vaughan also be committing a form of mimicry?<sup>422</sup>

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This brings us to a complication in Hilda Vaughan's use of language in the novels. The struggle for power and identity in language is complicated by class. The relationship between language and class is explored in *The Invader*. Daniel Evans is aggrieved when the Squire refuses to accept his version of events after the Squire's shepherd, who has been coursing Daniel's sheep, breaks his arm fleeing from the farmer. Daniel believes that his class has some bearing on the perceived authority of his story:

'Treating me like dirt,' he muttered as he clattered home. 'Not so much as giving me *Mr. Evans*! Refusing to take my word, because it wasn't the "word of a gentleman." Oh yes, I do know how the quality talk among themselves. But what is a gentleman without money? Only a poor come-down-in-the-world as no one is ready to believe. When I am owning the money and the land and the house of a gentleman, then, maybe, they'll be thinking as I've got "*the word of a gentleman*" too! (p. 22)

<sup>421</sup> Vaughan hailed from Welsh land-owning gentry. For Vaughan's class position see the introduction to this thesis. Vaughan's portrayal of social class in the novels is also discussed in detail in the conclusion of this thesis.

<sup>422</sup> This 'mimicry' of the working-class Welsh can be seen in other writing by Welsh female authors in English. For example in *The Rebecca Rioter* Amy Dillwyn narrates the novel using the Gower dialect of her working-class protagonist, who is also often imagined to be speaking in Welsh. See Amy Dillwyn, *The Rebecca Rioter: A Story of Killay Life* (1880; Dinas Powys: Honno, 2004).

In this passage, Daniel's title, 'Mr. Evans', is denied him because of his lower social status. The authority of his words is less powerful due to his class, as he is not a 'gentleman'. The language of the 'quality' is distanced and separate from him as they 'talk among themselves', though, interestingly, not entirely closed off from his hearing. Daniel aspires to money and property but also the greater authority in language that his higher status could award. The link between language and status is also seen in an exchange between Daniel and Miss Webster. When Miss Webster accuses him of underhand dealings, Daniel tells her:

I have allus been reckoned an honest man. I am well known and respected here, and am having high up gentry, on the bench even, as 'ull speak for me. You are strange here, knowing nothing about us, and you have been coming into the district and calling me a thief. 'Tis a serious thing to say of a man in my position, and I'm afraid as you'll have to prove the truth o' your words in court. (pp. 82-3)

Daniel's status has a direct bearing on his relation to language. His 'respectability' means that he can rely on the 'word' of others to defend him. Miss Webster's allegation is 'a serious thing to say of a man in my position', suggesting that his position determines the level of 'seriousness' of the claim. The idea that language has varying levels of authority and validity depending on who is using it is made clear. The higher the social status, it seems, the greater their power over language.

The relationship between language and colonialism is complicated when the extra factor of class is also present. As Bill Ashcroft et al. point out with regard to Caribbean literature:

Some of the clearer examples of switching between codes occurs in texts which directly describe pidgin and Creole forms. The most significant feature of their use in the literature is that they become a common mode of discourse between classes. But class in the post-colonial text is a category occasioned by more than

an economic structure; it is a discourse traversed by potent racial and cultural signifiers.<sup>423</sup>

Such a complex tension between language, ethnicity and class can be seen at work in *The Invader*. The novel depicts many characters with varying social and ethnic backgrounds, reflected in their use of language. The Welsh working class speak in Radnorshire dialect, Miss Webster speaks in feminist rhetoric, Fay uses modern English slang, the Squire talks in old literary English and Monica and the Doctor in Standard English. The narrator uses Standard English as well and so awards authority to the English doctor and Monica, who are essentially speaking on an equal footing with the narrator. This is further complicated by the implied presence of a readership, some of whom will also use Standard English. Vaughan's fiction is largely preoccupied with the lives of working-class characters but there is a gap between their language and that of the narrative, which is conceivably shared by the educated English reader. Vaughan was writing about a class that was lower than her own and so, despite being Welsh, she does not share their dialect; in fact, linguistically, she is closer to the English reader than the characters she portrays. Despite Vaughan's attempt to question the privilege of Standard English, the fact that it is the language of the narrative undermines this. There is no reason why Vaughan, in belonging to one class, cannot write about another, but it inevitably creates a tension in the novels that is not suitably resolved.<sup>424</sup>

If we return once more to Heller's idea that code switching is a 'boundary levelling or boundary maintaining strategy' we will see that Vaughan uses language constantly to negotiate and renegotiate the boundaries of identity. While she recognises

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<sup>423</sup> Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, pp. 74-5.

<sup>424</sup> This is not a new problem, of course. It also arises in the work of Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell but in Vaughan's case the added factor of the colonial situation further heightens the tension.

the differences between the English-speaking and Welsh-speaking Welsh, she uses the hybridised Radnorshire dialect, along with other devices, to create a more unified and stable Welsh identity, levelling the boundaries that create difference. She is not a Welsh-speaker herself but she includes many characters that are and she is surprisingly non-judgemental in her treatment of the language. In fact, she seems to find the tension between the two languages much less problematic than many male Welsh writers writing in English such as Gwyn Thomas, Dylan Thomas and R. S. Thomas.<sup>425</sup> This is, in part, due to the different gendered relationship with language, but owes something also to Vaughan's social class which excludes her from the debate and from the decision to 'choose' a language. Though she firmly identified herself as Welsh, her class means that there is no question of her speaking Welsh; it is simply not expected of her and is a matter for the lower classes. She also uses language to maintain the boundary of difference with the English, though in her recognition of her English audience she makes occasional breaches in this boundary to include them when she deems it necessary. To illustrate her use of language, the re-examination of the following extract from *The Invader* proves useful. Here, Miss Webster encounters the Jones family and the boundaries created and dismantled by language can be seen:

'Is there a man here who can help with my car?' Miss Webster asked, without those preliminary remarks on weather, health and condition of agriculture which the custom of Wales demands.

'What's on the old car then?' Mrs. Jones demanded.

'What's on it?' Miss Webster repeated. 'I don't understand.'

'You're a foreigner, are you? Maybe German now? We've heard a terrible lot about them Germans these last few years.'

'German! Good heavens, no! Can't you tell I'm English?'

'You don't seem able to understand English, whatever.' (p. 95)

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<sup>425</sup> Of course their perspectives on language are all quite different but they have all struggled with the conflict between the two languages of Wales in one way or another.

While both characters are speaking English, Vaughan makes their difference clear. The Englishwoman is firmly established as foreign. The reference to 'German' is also very interesting. It is used to present Miss Webster as an outsider but, significantly, this novel is set very soon after the First World War and its subplot depicts a character that has returned from active service, so that the reference to 'German' is also a subtle appeal to the English reader that they share common interests and identities as well. While the Welsh and the English are different, they have also recently been united in their struggle against a different outside 'other'. The passage also relies on the linguistic differences between social classes. The comical situation seems to privilege, or normalise, the language of working-class Wales but neither of the characters in the situation are privy to this humour; rather, it is shared by the narrator and the reader, who are using or reading Standard English. The author's own class position and consequent use of language problematise her attempt to award authority to the language used by her working-class characters. Language and its relationship with social class create a boundary between her and the characters she depicts. While Vaughan endeavours to negotiate and renegotiate the ideal Welsh identity, linguistically, at least, it is ultimately one that she cannot fully share.

## Conclusion

In the introduction to this thesis we saw that, despite her earlier worldwide success, Hilda Vaughan's work suffered critical neglect during the second half of the twentieth century. While feminist publishing houses such as Virago and Persephone in England reprinted the texts of contemporaries whose work was compared with that of Vaughan – for example, the Sussex novelist, Sheila Kaye-Smith – no attempt was made to republish any of Vaughan's novels. I would argue that this is largely because of their Welsh focus which has been characteristically under-represented in British women's fiction. This is a point raised by Katie Gramich who argues that, 'Welsh women writers have been until very recently virtually invisible';<sup>426</sup> presenting as a case in point Elaine's Showalter's *Literature of their Own: British Women Writers from Brontë to Lessing* (1977) which only discusses novels by English female writers. Interestingly, the work of a fellow Welsh female writer that was reissued by Virago, was Dorothy Edwards' *Rhapsody* (1927, republished in 1986) and *Winter Sonata* (1928, republished in 1986), a collection of short stories and a novel set largely in the English countryside, with little reference to Wales.

Until the very end of the twentieth century, when *A Thing of Nought* (1934)<sup>427</sup> and *Iron and Gold* (1948)<sup>428</sup> were reprinted by the Welsh feminist press, Honno, Vaughan's work was also neglected within the field of Anglo-Welsh fiction. This was, in part, due to the dismissal of her writing by critics on account of her social class, as the introduction to

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<sup>426</sup> Katie Gramich, *Twentieth-Century Women's Writing in Wales: Land Gender and Belonging* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>427</sup> *A Thing of Nought* (1934) is reproduced in *A View Across the Valley: Short Stories by Women from Wales c. 1850-1950*, ed. Jane Aaron (Dinas Powys: Honno, 1999), pp. 132-171.

<sup>428</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *Iron and Gold* (Dinas Powys: Honno, 2002) with an introduction by Jane Aaron.

this thesis suggests. As we have seen previously, Glyn Jones, for example, in *The Dragon Has Two Tongues* (1968) explains that his study will not discuss Vaughan, or indeed Nigel Heseltine, Richard Hughes, Elisabeth Inglis-Jones and ‘Twm Teg’ because they ‘write about the squirearchy and its anglicised apers.’<sup>429</sup> Before she was claimed as a Welsh female writer, then, Vaughan inhabited a curious position, in which her ‘problematic’ identity saw her work slip between categories of criticism; she was, in effect, too Welsh for the English and too Anglicised for the Welsh. This thesis has consistently discussed the tensions created by Vaughan’s class position in her work, showing that it was indeed, an aspect of her identity that dislocated her from the majority of her compatriots. In this conclusion I would like to revisit the idea of social class in Vaughan’s work in the light of criticism such as that voiced by Glyn Jones. This conclusion will attempt to determine whether Jones’s dismissal is fair and whether it is accurate to think of Vaughan simply as a writer of the squirearchy. It will evaluate the specific portrayal of class in Vaughan’s novels and how this positions the ideology of her work, before going on to assess the contribution that Vaughan has made to Welsh writing in English as a whole.

While the prevailing view of Vaughan’s work in contemporary reviews is positive, two reports raise different objections to her writing on the grounds of class. A review of *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* (1932) in *The Times* complains that, ‘the final tragedy, impressively staged though it is, fails of its effect because the conflict turns

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<sup>429</sup> Glyn Jones, *The Dragon Has Two Tongues: Essays on Anglo-Welsh Writers and Writing* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd., 1968), p. 42. This is discussed in the introduction to this thesis.

on a difference of breeding and social usage rather than on the clash of character.’<sup>430</sup> In a review of the same novel in *The Liverpool Post* it is stated that,

Miss Hilda Vaughan’s books are written rather from the angle of the country house, and the country house generally harbours a society whose point of view is very remote from that of the average Welsh man or woman.<sup>431</sup>

Though the first criticism of Vaughan’s reliance on class assumptions sometimes seems to be justified, the second view of her work is highly debatable. The novel referred to here, *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman*, portrays the battle of wits between a middle-class Englishman who inherits a Welsh estate and his Welsh upper-class wife who succeeds in wresting control of the estate from him. Dick’s weakness (which, as we have seen in chapters one and three of this thesis, is reiterated throughout the novel) is conflated with his class. He is described as a ‘common little suburban with a pale moustache, this governess’s son, whose father had been cut off from the family by his misalliance!’<sup>432</sup> Even this short description of Dick’s ‘pale’ moustache is telling, hinting at the illness and weakness that characterise him and that eventually allow Gwenllian to kill him and win control of the country manor. Though the language here is the upper-class Gwenllian’s and much of the snobbery and class prejudice of the novel is voiced by the characters, the narrative itself occasionally reinforces the link between Dick’s inadequacy and his social class. His notable lack of confidence is explained by his mixed-class parentage and lack of money which has caused him to be the object of mockery as a youth and later in the army (p. 19). In the first chapter of this thesis we saw how Vaughan biologises class differences and this idea of breeding and inheritance is used to explain

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<sup>430</sup> *The Times*, May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1932.

<sup>431</sup> *Liverpool Post*, December 19<sup>th</sup>, 1932.

<sup>432</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1932), p. 46. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.



Dick and Gwenllian's characteristics. Dick's parentage and upbringing account for his uneasy feelings towards the estate he has inherited:

I don't take much pleasure in all this, Dick thought, scowling at the empty lawns. Gwen would say that that was because he hadn't been born to it; and, though he scarcely liked to admit it to himself, he was envious of the city clerks who lived in comfortable obscurity among their own class. He'd like to have more money than they had and he didn't want to sit in an office all day, but he wanted everything else of theirs – their girls, their motorbikes, their boat on the river with a gramophone – and he'd like working in the garden on Saturdays. Get your coat off, work a bit, come in for tea; perhaps a game of bridge afterwards... He imagined at the tea-table under the pink-shaded lamp a young wife whom he could banter. There'd be jokes between them; they'd chatter in bed in the dark. And when he was working in the garden she'd trip after him in high-heeled shoes. He saw the shoes very clearly. Gwen would call them bad style. Still, they were what he liked on a pretty girl's feet. (p. 235)

Though the text does not present either Gwenllian or Dick as particularly sympathetic characters or specimens of their class, this supposed neutrality is disrupted by the class assumptions that are inherent in the narrative.

While *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* is the most class-conscious of Vaughan's novels, the notion that the different social classes possess inherited traits can also be seen in *Her Father's House* (1930). In this text, Nell Tretower is another product of a union between ill-matched classes. The working-class Hannah Pugh marries the aristocratic Gethin Tretower and their unhappy marriage results in the wife leaving the estate with her two daughters, Nell and Bella, to stay on her brother's farm. Despite Nell's working-class upbringing, however, she displays the traits of the noble Tretower family. She has 'spirit and valour ... along o' the breeding as is in her.'<sup>433</sup> The mixed marriage between classes results in a clash of values and the faults and merits of both classes are pointed out equally by the text, though they often conform to class

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<sup>433</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *Her Father's House* (London: Heinemann, 1930), p. 16. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

stereotyping. The Nonconformist primness and pride of Hannah is counterpoised by the debauched recklessness of the alcoholic, womanising gambler, Gethin. Hannah's respectable working-class moralising is in opposition to her husband's aristocratic aestheticism, as she declares to her brother, '[y]ou didn't tell me his house was full of naked women – pictures and images – nor of the trouble there'd be when I threatened to burn the heathenish old stuff... (p. 11). Interestingly, their offspring display the potential for the positive and negative products of their parents' mismatched relationship. Bella inherits her father's aristocratic excesses but, without the wealth to accompany them, she becomes a prostitute in London. Nell, on the other hand, inherits her father's nobility tempered by her mother's strong morality and at the end of the novel she takes over the family's estate. As Glyn Jones and the criticism of the *Liverpool Post* suggested, both *Her Father's House* and *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* are indeed novels that are centred upon a manor house. In fact, the country house is fetishized by Nell in a similar way to Gwenllian's more negative, pathological attachment to her estate. Her relationship with the house is described in markedly sensual terms: Nell 'liked to be alone with the house, to catch at its beckoning memories, to run her fingers over the carved banisters and think that their shape also was familiar to her, to breathe in the many scents of the place...' (p. 56). Nell and her husband's inheritance of the stately home, however, is not an uncomplicated continuance of a noble dynasty. As the doctor points out to them, there are those in the parish that oppose their inheritance as the couple 'had not been reared to the responsibility of such a house as this' (p. 341). It is a working-class couple, for all Nell's ancestry, that take over the estate. While Vaughan's novels often depict the country house, they are not confined merely to the depiction of the upper classes.

Similarly, *The Invader* (1928) depicts the farmer, Daniel Evans's struggle to buy the large resplendent farmhouse of which he is a tenant. The house is inherited by the English Miss Webster who declares it unsuitable for the working-class Daniel: 'it's a fine looking old place. Very different from the poky little white-washed farmhouses we passed on the way... The tenant will have to go. It's much too good for a man of his class.'<sup>434</sup> His success in driving the Englishwoman out of the house to take residency himself is another instance of the working class taking over the country house in Vaughan's work. Despite professing a belief that the classes should follow in the traditions and pursuits allocated to them (p. 16), Daniel is a social climber and the text depicts a period of social change in Welsh and British society. Daniel considers the ease with which he will buy Plas Newydd from its aristocratic absentee landlord: 'Glad to take my money he'll be, for since the war, the gentries is going down faster nor ever, as I and mine are going up' (p. 2). Daniel foresees the weakening of the class system. He declares, 'I'll own what High Sheriffs o' the county have owned when my folks went in rags; I'll touch my hat to none; I'll have what I planned to have when I was a lump of a boy' (p. 2). Vaughan does not seem to oppose the ascent of the working class and Daniel is portrayed as a rather loveable rogue, despite his dastardly schemes. In fact, the working-class and upper-class characters are both viewed ambivalently in the text. The only characters that are wholeheartedly approved of are the English middle-class doctor and Monica, Miss Webster's companion and, by the close of the narrative, the doctor's betrothed. This is contrary to the prevailing view in other texts in which the English middle class is disapproved of. For example, in *Her Father's House*, Nell's employers

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<sup>434</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Invader* (London: Heinemann, 1928), p. 48. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

are seen by both Nell and the narrative as inferior to the Welsh servant, as ‘they were new people and she despised them’ (p. 217). This mirrors the relationship between the working-class Nest and her English middle-class employers in *The Curtain Rises* (1935), referred to in chapter two of this thesis. Vaughan’s textual snobbery seems to focus most aggressively on the middle rather than the working class. This inconsistency might be explained by the fact that *The Invader* was written earlier than Vaughan’s other novels while she was still in Wales, as we saw in the introduction to this thesis. In this text Vaughan seems to identify more closely with the English middle-class outsiders while in her later novels, written while her permanent residence was in England, her identification is transferred to the Welsh characters.

The idea espoused in *The Invader* that the British class system was changing is also a central theme in *Here Are Lovers* (1926). This text sees Vaughan tackling the issue of class hierarchy more thoroughly and directly than in any other of her novels. As we have seen, the plot focuses on the forbidden love between the aristocratic Laetitia Wingfield, daughter of the squire, and one of her father’s tenants, Gronwy Griffith who, despite his abject poverty, has scholarly leanings. Their relationship is contrary to the conventions of what is portrayed as a stifling society and the lovers commit suicide together. The melodrama of the romantic central storyline distracts from the fact that this novel is primarily about the conflict and misunderstanding between classes and the old social order that is coming to an end. The text is set from 1866 to 1867 and early on depicts the squire’s growing concern about the effect of Gladstone’s policies on the landed classes. He fumes, ‘Landowners taxed out of existence. Agriculture ruined. It’s

coming; you mark my words."<sup>435</sup> The changing social climate is also observed by the working-class Peter Griffith, in an echo of the Squire's words, as he tells his brother Gronwy,

you may think as I don't see further than my day's work... But, mind you, my head is as busy as ever yours is with your old book learnin'. Now mark my words, we'll see a wonderful change in farmin' in our lifetime. And those as is sharp enough to act accordin' 'ull prosper; but those as is bidin' in the old way, ruined they'll be ... Why, bigger ships, iron ones they do say, an' railways bringin' cheap foods and folks away from the countryside into the cities, 'twill send the price o' home-grown corn down an' the price o' country labour up. That farmer'll be the best as is payin' little wages and turnin' his plough land into pasture... Father can go on spuddin' thistles in the wheat and pleaching fences to pleasure the old squire... but not a stroke more tillin' the soil will I do than I'm driven to. Breedin' better stock, rentin' more hill land, followin' the markets so as I can buy cheap an' sell dear – that's my game... Father's been labourin' with his hands, same as Adam after the fall, all his life long, an' he's poor now as when he came back from Newport and started to rent the place. What's the good o' that? (pp. 132-3)

Peter and Gronwy's father mentioned here, John Griffith, was a Chartist who was imprisoned for his involvement in the 1839 Newport Rising (pp. 6-7). Though John's imprisonment has rid him of his working-class militancy, it continues in his elder son, Peter who, after his farm is taken from him and his brother commits suicide along with Laetitia, declares that upon the Wingfields 'an' on their class I will wage war – on the Bible I'll swear it – so long as there is breath in my body, so help me God' (p. 332). Contemporary reviews suggest that the novel was intended to be the first of a trilogy that would trace social change in rural Wales. In 1926 *The Observer* reported that,

[i]n the love of her plough-boy hero for the Squire's daughter, Miss Vaughan begins a trilogy which intends to trace through the fortunes of two families, the decline of the landed gentry and the rise to wealth and influence of the farming classes, from the time of Disraeli's Reform Bill down to the period following the late war.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>435</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *Here Are Lovers* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1926), p. 36. All further references are to this edition and are given parenthetically in the thesis.

<sup>436</sup> *Observer*, May 25<sup>th</sup>, 1926.

The two novels to follow *Here Are Lovers* were never written. Their absence leaves us to consider how different critical opinion of Vaughan's work might have been had the trilogy indeed been completed.

What is particularly striking about *Here Are Lovers* is the unbiased narrative view it takes of the different classes. Vaughan does not lament the demise of the squirearchy and portrays social change in matter-of-fact terms. In addition, the conflict between the upper class and the working class in the novel is depicted as a misunderstanding between two different sets of values and codes of conduct. In the squire's prohibition of the bundling custom, this is extended to cultural misunderstandings too, described by Laetitia as 'a little tragedy... of two races and two traditions' (p. 44). Political events are juxtaposed with the personal concerns of Vaughan's characters. At the close of the narrative the squire discusses Disraeli's Reform Bill with his son, Charles. He rages, "there are always traitors, ready to lower their own class." The squire stopped suddenly and bit his lip. Good God! That struck pretty near home – he might have been talking of his own family' (p. 338). The relationship between Laetitia and Gronwy sets into motion a chain of events that has equally destabilising effects for the members of all classes, which reveals that they are not so very different. Their mutual hostility is lamented as a barrier that will only lead to the continuation of class conflict and impede tolerance and progress. The young working-class woman, Elizabeth, voices the unbiased narrative position as she expresses her compassion for all involved in the tragedy. She realises that the broken and humiliated squire is a 'poor old lonely man' (p. 434), and goes on to express her pity for the others:

She remembered her last glimpse of Susan [a social climbing servant, jealous of Laetitia's riches and relationship with Gronwy], being driven in the squire's luggage cart to Llangantyn station on the morning after the discovery. How tortured and vindictive the white face and bitten lips had been! 'Poor gal!' Elizabeth mused. 'She were a hissy sort – soon up an' over. Long after such love as ever she had is dead, she 'ull go keepin' the hurt of it alive through anger, God forgive her! ... And her poor dead lady and her sweetheart, as was more afeared to live than to die, God forgive them too! ... God forgive the old squire as is shuttin' his heart up, an' my dear, foolish Peter there, thinkin' as he'll find balm for hisself by doin' another mischief.' She clasped her hands and whispered: 'Lord Jesus, who died for them, do Thou draw the poison out o' their hurted spirits as has had a part in this sad story,' and she added, because there was more she needed to say for which she had no words of her own, 'and have mercy upon all men. Amen. Amen.' (pp. 344-5).

Here, Elizabeth, reflecting the general consensus of Vaughan's text, makes a plea for the recognition of common humanity that cuts through the boundaries of class.

It is significant that Vaughan gives the final word in *Here Are Lovers* to a young working-class woman. As we have seen in chapter four of this thesis, it is such a figure that was to predominate in Vaughan's fiction. In fact, it could be argued that Vaughan's work could just as easily be characterised by its depiction of working-class heroines as it could by the portrayal of the country house. The portrait of Elizabeth as stoic and humble, wise, strong and selfless can be read as owing something to the notion of the 'noble savage,' combined with the mythology of Welsh working class womanhood, such as the 'Welsh mam'. In the final scene, as Elizabeth stands on the hillside in the rain giving her message of hope for humanity, there is something iconic and representative about her: 'The wind bit through her threadbare clothes; her feet and ankles were chilled in the sodden grass; when she looked down at her hands, with which she had been butter-making in cold water all morning she saw that they were chapped across the knuckles and were oozing blood' (p. 344). Vaughan's depiction of working-class women, as we have seen, however, goes further than this. There is a strong sense of genuine respect for

working-class women in Vaughan's novels. As we saw in chapters one and five, however, this admiration is specific to rural Welsh characters and does not extend to the working-class of industrial Wales or England. The description of Elizabeth also brings to mind a quotation from Vaughan's autobiographical writing:

The most compassionate, the wisest people, gentle as they are strong, whom I have known are those who have felt and suffered much. But suffering, like suddenly acquired wealth, is a searching test of character. Few come through the ordeal with any credit.<sup>437</sup>

This was written by Vaughan about her land-owning father but it could equally characterise the many working-class heroines in her novels such as Elizabeth in *Here Are Lovers*, Megan in *A Thing of Nought* (1934) and Esther in *The Battle to the Weak* (1925).

It would be misleading to suggest that class is not an important issue in Vaughan's work. In fact, in this thesis we have often seen that Vaughan's class has led to a fracturing of identity in her writing, as the upper-middle class author is dislocated from the working-class characters of the agricultural communities that she depicts. This plays a vital part in her portrayal of landscape, folklore and language in particular, as we saw in chapters five, six and seven of this thesis. Class is an important component of Vaughan's identity which must and does colour her writing. Though five of her ten novels depict the country house or upper-class characters (even if the two things are not always connected, as we have seen), this of course, leaves another five that do not. In fact, some of Vaughan's finest writing, such as *The Battle to the Weak* and the novella *A Thing of Nought* depict, almost exclusively, working-class characters. In chapter four of this thesis we also saw how Vaughan displays a very real concern for the social conditions of working-class women, perhaps particularly in *The Battle to the Weak*. In the introduction

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<sup>437</sup> Hilda Vaughan, from her unpublished and uncatalogued autobiographical writing. Reproduced by kind permission of Mr. Roger Morgan.



to this thesis I suggested that Vaughan's work had been neglected by critics for a long period due to its perceived failure to depict a 'representative' view of the majority of Wales, in contrast with the male, working-class industrial fiction of the South Wales valleys that portrays Welsh experience in a mass form. While I hope that I have shown that Vaughan is much more than a writer of the Welsh 'squirearchy and its anglicised apers', I would also point out that even in novels such as *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* and *Pardon and Peace* (1945), in which the plot largely portrays the middle and upper classes, Vaughan nonetheless makes a valuable contribution to Welsh fiction in English. In recent literary scholarship efforts to revisit and reinvigorate the work of forgotten writers have very legitimately focussed on marginalised narratives such as those of women writers or ethnic minorities, for example. Though her work fits into such efforts of literary salvaging due to her gender, Vaughan's class has been problematic in this sense. As a writer belonging to a privileged class in Wales, her novels of the country house cannot be said to represent the voice of an oppressed people, even if they do belong to one whose voice has been somewhat under-represented in Welsh fiction in English. Though her work is perhaps not entirely representative of the majority of the Welsh, it offers an insight into a certain kind of Welsh identity that broadens and enriches our understanding of Welsh literature in English as a heterogeneous field. In fact, it begs the question of whether it is even useful to think of writing in terms of its 'representative' properties. To exclude writers who do not fit this vague and narrow category would be to deny the plurality of Welsh identity and to rob Welsh fiction in English of some of its most interesting and intriguing writers; such as Dorothy Edwards who, as Claire Flay has recently suggested, makes an important contribution to Welsh writing in English since

her male-centred, English-set narratives can be read as a form of ventriloquism which subverts masculinity and Englishness from within.<sup>438</sup>

Although Vaughan hailed from a class that distanced her to an extent from her compatriots, this thesis has also shown how Vaughan engages with issues that place her work alongside that of other Welsh writers, writing in both English and Welsh. As a brief example, Vaughan's strong rural-Welsh heroines and significantly weaker male characters are reminiscent of the spirited women and their less vocal male counterparts in Kate Roberts's narratives, as we saw in chapter four of this thesis. In chapter six it is suggested that Vaughan's depiction of Welsh folk culture is comparable with that of Anne Beale, while her attempts to preserve a Welsh past and its traditions is similar to that found in the work of Gwyneth Vaughan. In like manner, her depiction of the rural tradition of the pleasure fair and its links with promiscuity discussed in chapter five is a trope also encountered in the Welsh female novelist, Elena Puw Morgan's *Y Wisg Sidan* (1939). Parallels can be drawn between Vaughan's exploration of Welsh female sexuality and its juxtaposition with racial discourse and stereotype and their similar depiction in Rhys Davies's *The Black Venus* (1944), as we saw in chapter one of this thesis. Vaughan's portrayal of the relationship between England and Wales finds parallels with that of Bertha Thomas in chapter five. In addition, Vaughan's work shares similarities with Thomas's depiction of the new woman, seen in chapter four, and eugenics, as seen in chapter one of this thesis. Even Vaughan's class that has been a barrier to her inclusion in some studies of Welsh fiction in English is one shared by Eiluned Lewis, as we have seen in chapter five, as well as in the introduction to this thesis. Moreover, the structure

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<sup>438</sup> Claire Flay, 'Representations of gender in Dorothy Edwards's short stories', paper given on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2008 at the 'Welsh Women's Writing' postgraduate symposium at Cardiff University. Flay's research on Edwards will appear in her forthcoming 'Writers of Wales' monograph on the writer.

of the thesis, which reflects Vaughan's literary return to Wales and Welshness is a feature shared with the work and life of the Welsh author, Geraint Goodwin, with whom, as we saw in the introduction to this thesis, she was familiar. Both authors were border writers and Sam Adams's description of Goodwin is highly reminiscent of Vaughan's own identity: 'there is that sense of distancing, that sense of belonging yet not belonging to a community, a social system which often provides a writer both motivation and objectivity.'<sup>439</sup> Like Vaughan, Goodwin moved to London and both writers found guidance from the critic, Edward Garnett. It was he who urged Goodwin to return to Wales, both physically and in his writing, a return that can also be seen, though to a less dramatic degree, in the work of Vaughan. In addition, Vaughan's work engages with and comments upon many cultural, political and social movements in Wales, for example, the rise of Welsh drama in *The Curtain Rises*, Welsh nationalism in *The Candle and the Light*, 'Back to the Land' policies and agricultural change, as we saw in chapter five of this thesis, and the effect of education reforms in chapter two. Like Goodwin and, as we saw in chapters five and six of this thesis, like Glythin in *Iron and Gold* (1948), Vaughan uses her complicated identity of the relative outsider to comment on the country to which she simultaneously belongs and yet does not belong.

Just as Vaughan's work shares many similar concerns with those of other Welsh writers, her novels are also closely connected with Wales and Welsh identity, even when the plot occasionally moves into England. In chapters one to four we have seen how she engages with influences from outside Wales, specifically, scientific ideas, cultural

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<sup>439</sup> Sam Adams, *Geraint Goodwin* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1975), p. 5. Goodwin's 1936 novel, *The Heyday in the Blood* has recently been published in Parthian's Library of Wales series, suggesting that there is a contemporary move afoot to re-evaluate hitherto neglected Welsh writers such as Goodwin and Vaughan.

change, war and emerging female roles but always relates them back to their effect on Wales and the Welsh. This perspective helps to present a view of Wales in relation to Britain and the rest of the world. This view is revisited in the final chapter in which Vaughan's 'interpretation' of Wales to an English audience, as well as the worldwide readership that Vaughan's novels commanded, shows Vaughan's depiction of Wales and its links to the outside world, though this also brings tensions and complications to the narrative positioning. While there is a strong sense of the outside world in these first four chapters, there is also an awareness of Vaughan's sensitivity to Wales's difference and specific identity. For example, in the first chapter we see how *The Battle to the Weak* calls for the adaptation of the ideas of Social Darwinism to suit the different needs of Wales and the Welsh, particularly to incorporate religion and to safeguard small nations. Similarly, Vaughan is hesitant about the merits of universal education and Anglo-American mass culture in Wales and her texts highlight the requirement to respect and protect the Welsh language and culture, as we saw in chapter two. Vaughan's depiction of war in the novels endorses the British identity that takes precedence at this time but with a consciousness of the sacrifice this entails for Welsh identity. In a similar manner, chapter four demonstrates Vaughan's depiction of the 'English' style of feminism as a concept not wholly suited to Wales. Similarly, the strength of her rural heroines is tempered by the need to uphold tradition and some elements of the patriarchal society. Though Vaughan is not a straightforward feminist writer, her novels do contain a sustained exploration of gender and the injustices faced by women within marriage, the family home and the nation as a whole. This can be seen, for example, in the representation of domestic violence, drudgery and successive pregnancies suffered by

Annie Bevan in *The Battle to the Weak*; the tensions between art and domesticity, gender and nation for Nest and Grace in *The Curtain Rises* and *The Candle and the Light* (1954); and, as Jane Aaron has argued, her retelling of the Llyn-y-Fan-Fach legend in *Iron and Gold* pays particular attention to the feminist possibilities of the tale.<sup>440</sup> In the last three chapters of this thesis we have seen that in her later work, Vaughan is increasingly focused on Wales itself, exploring ideas about Welsh identity, roots and origins, which often have parallels with Vaughan's construction of her own identity. Throughout the thesis as a whole, whether looking from Wales into the wider world or in her focus on Wales alone, we can see Vaughan examining the relationship between nation and gender in her novels. This can be seen, for example, in the dual influences of gender and nation on Nest in *The Curtain Rises* and *The Candle and the Light* in chapter two, as well as the depiction of Glythin as a character who can be read as representative of the nation, seen in chapter five of the thesis.

As is the case in the work of many Welsh writers, as well as writers from other nations, the past features prominently in Vaughan's work. There is a preoccupation with ancestry, property and traditions in Vaughan's novels and her portrayal of a rural, peasant way of life that was rapidly disappearing can be seen to share many attributes with what Kirsti Bohata refers to as nativist constructions of cultural authenticity which 'look back to the pre-colonial past in order to salvage what is conceived to be an essential or pure culture.'<sup>441</sup> Vaughan sidesteps this trap, however, with a degree of sophistication. In fact,

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<sup>440</sup> See Jane Aaron, introduction to Hilda Vaughan, *Iron and Gold* (1948; Dinas Powys: Honno, 2002), pp. vii-xviii.

<sup>441</sup> Kirsti Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 15. All further references are to this edition.

the narrative voice of *The Battle to the Weak* points out Rhys's folly when he does so himself:

He talked of the 'golden age' of Wales, of poetry and harp playing, royal hospitality, and chivalrous love. From a smattering of historical knowledge he drew large deductions, ignoring what did not appeal to him in his country's story, and enlarging what was best, making the past appear as he would have the future be. In all good faith he fancied himself looking back, when in reality he was straining forward.<sup>442</sup>

Instead, Vaughan constructs what Bohata terms a 'useable past',<sup>443</sup> which allows the nation to perceive its individual identity, while traditions and culture are handed on in altered forms to a new generation. This is most apparent in her retelling of the legend of Llyn-y-Fan-Fach in *Iron and Gold*, in which the ancient tale is transformed into a novel in the English language. While preservation is important, sensitive adaptation takes precedence over a stagnant and static past.

Despite the construction of difference and otherness in Vaughan's work, there is also an awareness of the importance of recognising similarity. This can be seen in Vaughan's depiction of class and language as we saw earlier in this conclusion and in chapter seven of this thesis. Vaughan's texts display an attempt to portray members of a class that was not her own and a language that she did not speak herself with sympathy and understanding. In fact, her approach is often conciliatory, for example her depiction of the common suffering between the classes in *Here Are Lovers* and her narrative attempts to bridge the linguistic divide in Wales. This also extends to her portrayal of the relationship between England and Wales, for example, in chapter seven of this thesis, we saw that though the English Miss Webster is presented as linguistically remote from members of the Welsh community, this is accompanied by narrative devices that remind

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<sup>442</sup> Hilda Vaughan, *The Battle to the Weak* (Harper and Brothers, New York and London, 1925), pp. 39-40.

<sup>443</sup> Bohata, *Postcolonialism Revisited*, p. 14.

the English and Welsh of their shared concerns as well. While there is difference from England there is not necessarily antagonism and where this does exist, it is not endorsed by the text. This is most evident in *The Soldier and the Gentlewoman* in which Gwenllian's endeavours to preserve her Welsh land and 'race' at the expense of English life is condemned, transforming the Welsh landscape into a place of burial.

It is the interconnections rather than the divisions in Vaughan's portrayal of identity that are most interesting. Her novels offer an insightful exploration of the relationship between Welshness, Englishness and Britishness, most obviously in her depiction of war but also in the many relationships, romantic and otherwise, between Welsh and English characters. Vaughan's work provides an important contribution to our understanding of identity during a particular historical period when notions of Welshness and Britishness were being negotiated. With this in mind, I would argue that not only is Hilda Vaughan an important Welsh writer but that her work must also take a recognised place within British literature. Vaughan's writing and her own identity illuminate the relationship between Welshness and Britishness that it would be neglectful to ignore. As we saw in the introduction to this thesis, Vaughan was a significant member of a vibrant literary scene in London with strong links to Wales. The 'problematic' identity that left Vaughan's writing unclaimed by the Welsh and the English alike, discussed at the beginning of this conclusion is, in fact, one of the aspects that makes her work most important. She is, in effect, a writer who bridges the gap between Welshness and Britishness. In 1926 J. Gwenogvryn Evans stated in the *Western Mail* that Hilda Vaughan 'has no rival in the field of Welsh fiction.'<sup>444</sup> While his claim ignores the importance of some of Vaughan's contemporaries, his declaration of the author's significance in Welsh

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<sup>444</sup> J. Gwenogvryn Evans in the *Western Mail*, September 25<sup>th</sup>, 1926.

fiction in English suggests that it is imperative that her work is not forgotten. Her contemporary reputation, her worldwide success, her unique literary position and the enriching contribution that her work provides means that to ignore Vaughan's work can only result in an incomplete version of the history of Welsh literature in English, and indeed, British literature as a whole.



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### **Archival Material**

A large archive of Vaughan's reviews, correspondence, notes, manuscripts and miscellaneous papers are uncatalogued and privately held by Hilda Vaughan's son, Mr. Roger Morgan.

### **Contemporary Reviews and Notices**

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